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SIR CHARLES DILKE  
1872 -3.

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# SPEECHES

BY

SIR CHARLES WENTWORTH DILKE,  
BART., M.P.

AUTHOR OF 'GREATER BRITAIN.'

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1872—1873.

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LONDON :  
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# SPEECHES BY SIR CHARLES DILKE, BART., M.P.

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## CLASS LEGISLATION.

*Glasgow, 30th of September, 1872.*

To teach by example, we are often told, is to adopt the best of all methods to enforce our views. If, on your invitation, I am to venture upon the singular task of teaching anything to those from whom, in the larger part of politics, I should the rather learn, I will first bring before you some examples of Class Legislation drawn from our doings in Parliament this year.

Speaking as I am to the inhabitants of a mighty city, I shall have your sympathies when I say that no example could be more forcible, as one of what I call Class Legislation, than that of the Birmingham Sewage Bill of 1872. That Bill was rejected in the interest of individuals, and against the interest of the State. I do not mean to say that private interests directly weighed with the majority on that occasion, but while a few may have voted out of party feeling, and *not* a few by following friends, undoubtedly the larger portion of those who formed the majority voted out of a landowner's feeling of sympathy with landowners whose land it was proposed to take for public purposes. Now, if ever compulsory purchase of land is to be permitted, this would seem to have been an occasion which would justify that purchase. Here was a city which had more than doubled its population within thirty years, and which is increasing at the present moment at a still more rapid rate. It is a very poor city, and a city which hitherto has from natural circumstances been prevented from disposing of its sewage in a scientific way. It was proposed, under an Act of Parliament, to

purchase land. The Bill cost altogether some 20,000*l*. It had been carefully examined by a committee, and the committee was unanimously favourable to it. On the division, the minority represented vastly more voters than the majority; and among the minority were two of the members for Glasgow, elected by a constituency of 50,000 voters, whose votes, in the division, were tied by those given by Captain Stacpoole, who represents 235 electors, and The O'Donoghue, who represents 301; or by Colonel Knox, who represents 257, and Mr. Keown, who represents 263. These happen to be Irish members that I name. Irish members voting upon the disposal of the sewage of an English town. I am often tempted to think that parliamentary government here is conducted on the principles of Austrian military rule, in which Magyars are played off against Croats, and Germans against Magyars:—so here—Irish members against Scotch, and English against both. What confidence, after this Birmingham decision, can we feel in the working in the interest of the people, as contrasted with that of the landowners, of the Sanitary Act of this session, or of the County Government Act of next?

Another startling instance of the abuses of our Parliamentary system is to be found in the vote of 4,000*l*. for the law costs of Governor Eyre. It may of course be said that in voting for the grant, no member voted approval of the conduct of Governor Eyre, and it may even be shown that several members distinctly stated that that conduct was disapproved by them, and yet voted for the grant. At the same time, one has to look, not only to the strict legal bearing of a proposition, but to the way in which it will be taken in the country, and to the consequent effect produced on public morals. Now, perhaps a hundred people in Parliament, but certainly not ten, I should think, outside of Parliament, looked at the vote as implying anything but approval of the conduct of Governor Eyre. The defence fund which had been raised had more than covered the expenses to which Governor Eyre had been put; and there is no absolute understanding that the expenses incurred by a colonial governor in defending himself against a suit should be borne by others than himself and his own friends. The only defence that could be really made was, that the present Government, a Liberal Ministry,

chiefly composed of members who, as individuals, disapprove the conduct of Governor Eyre, considered themselves bound by the promises given by their Conservative predecessors. Now, it is a most astounding proposition, that a ministry of one party, and of one set of principles, who ousted their predecessors on the understanding that they considered the policy of those predecessors wholly wrong, should, as soon as they come into office, feel themselves under a compulsion to adopt and make their own the promises of those predecessors. If such a principle is to prevail, it seems clear to me that it is far less by party than by class that we are governed. A majority of men on both sides, perhaps—certainly a majority of the other side and a large minority upon ours—are men who, while they admit that Governor Eyre acted injudiciously, and that his proceedings are to be regretted, nevertheless refuse to see a man of their own set humiliated at the bidding of a body of Baptist missionaries.

Illustrations come thickly to us from last session. If there be any one subject upon which men of all shades of politics, outside of the House of Commons, are agreed, it is the need of law reform. But one of my friends was defeated, not without ridicule, when he showed that the legal advisers of the Government are well enough paid for us to expect that they should cease to give most of their time to private practice; and Sir George Jessel, Solicitor-General to a Liberal administration, was applauded, when, in answer to another, he told us that law reform was impossible, because the people did not want it, and that the Court of Chancery was perfect. As we have been long since told,

“Nothing’s consistent in the human race,  
Except the Whigs in getting into place.”

Sir George Jessel is, I believe, a Chancery lawyer, while the discussion bore rather upon the common law. In his defence of the Court of Chancery, he went somewhat out of his way to be one-sided, and reminded me of a constable upon his beat in a narrow road, of whom I once asked where in that road was the nearest post-office. His answer was—there is one on this side of the road five hundred paces to the west of this, but I can’t say anything whatever about the other side. Mr. Harcourt’s motion asserted that the administration

of the law is costly, dilatory, and inefficient—an opinion in which those of us who have had anything to do with it would agree. When Sir George Jessel denied that the Government shared this view, Mr. Henley said in his homely style that it was “rather a poor look out,” and on this occasion, as on many others, the Radical members of the House felt inclined to think that Mr. Henley was not far wrong.

It is not only in connexion with law that Parliament—a Parliament in which the poor are never heard—shows itself indifferent to extravagance and waste. With an income-tax pressing heavily upon the industry of the middle class, and with the mass of the people unable to provide themselves with the necessities of healthy existence, and who pay by taxes on their food for the maintenance of the administration, one might have thought that those do good service to the country who call public attention to the necessity of a more stringent examination of the way in which public money is expended. Well, I can name to you offices which are pure sinecures, and to which fresh appointments have been made within a year, with a public statement to Parliament that there are duties to perform, and a private admission that such is not the case. None but a Government too fine for its work would retain a pension system under which former public servants, still well able to perform their duties, retire at an early age, and for a quarter of a century or for half a century continue to draw large annual payments, for which no work is done or due. A more popular Government would well pay its servants, but require them to make provision for themselves as others do. Pensions at least, however, are better than sinecures—sinecures, which, if defended much longer by Constitutionalists, may come to play to the constitution much the part which the parasitic plant called Spanish moss plays in California to the giant trees on which it grows—namely, first kill the tree and then likewise perish.

Let me come, now, nearer home with my examples of Class Legislation. We passed this year an Education Bill for Scotland. In the discussions in Committee on that Bill, a division might have been taken in favour of the principle of free schools. That division was not taken. Why? Simply because we found upon inquiry that not more than twenty members at the outside would have voted in favour of such a



proposition, although almost on the very day on which that amendment, had it been made, would have been discussed, the London papers were full of reports of the proceedings of the London School Board, to which I will refer, and which show the, as I think, insuperable difficulties in dealing in any other way with the education of the poor. The London School Board, numbering among its members some of the most distinguished persons of our time, was occupied for a whole afternoon with the consideration of the following questions: Whether a widow earning her livelihood as a charwoman, and having two children, of whom one was an infant, and the other a daughter nine years old, and whose income was 6*s.* a week, should be made to pay out of it for the schooling of her eldest daughter? A second case upon which they had to decide was, Whether a charwoman earning 9*s.* a week, and having three children, of whom two were to be sent to school, should be made to pay for the schooling of each of those two? The third was the case of a shirt-maker, earning 6*s.* a week, with one child. The fourth was the case of a woman deserted by her husband, but earning 8*s.* a week, having three children, of whom one was at school. The fifth was the case of a man who had been master of a coasting vessel, but who had been out of work for six months, and was looking for work in vain, and who had four children within the school age. Now, the difficulties of the question as to whether these five persons were to pay school fees for their children, or to have them paid, are difficulties which may be fairly said to be all but insuperable. You may pauperize these people by driving them directly on to the rates. If you do so, you increase these rates, and therefore bring other people again within the net; and you will find, unfortunately, that by the very smallest apparent extension of such a principle, such is the poverty of the mass of the people, that you will have increased your number of paupers by a vast proportion. If you are tender to these persons, you are hard upon others, who have to pay for them. If you are hard upon them, you cause misery in a vast number of individual cases, without any apparent benefit to the country as a whole. I doubt whether it is possible to maintain against public sentiment the enforced payment of school fees by a deserted woman, earning 6*s.* a week; but, on the other hand, if you once allow such an



exemption in a single case, you will have hundreds of thousands of families claiming the benefit of a similar remission. The only cure lies in an education of all classes purely gratuitous in its character—that is, paid for by a rate instead of a school fee. But, although many who have given much time and thought to this subject are in favour of such a scheme, such is the wealth of the individuals comprising public bodies of all kinds in this country, that it is difficult to obtain, I do not say a majority in favour of these views, but even their bare consideration. Owing to the non-adoption of a free school system, compulsion is all but a dead letter, and there being no registration of the children, and no accurate weekly returns from the schools, compulsion will soon, as at present worked, be seen to be arbitrary to a degree, and the sympathy of the people will be lost. A free school system need not be wholly paid for out of rates. I am not without hope that if ever Mr. Miall succeeds in disestablishing the church, an extension of the *cy-près* doctrine may give us its enormous surplus funds for the establishment of universal free schools, both primary and secondary, and connected with free university education and free technical universities, as the reward of merit.

I have not done with the examples of class legislation which I can draw from the proceedings of the last session. The discussion on the Parks Bill afforded another example of the same kind. The majority of the members of both Houses frequent the London parks, and are tempted to deal with them not purely in the public interest, but in the interest of that section of the public to which they themselves belong—a temptation against which no class of men are ever proof—a fact which only enforces the necessity of never putting absolute power into the hands of any one class by itself. The Bill was a Bill which introduced regulations for the parks extremely pleasant and convenient to persons with carriages and horses, but extremely inconvenient and irksome to those having none. I will not go through the almost idle restrictions which the Bill contained upon the enjoyment of the parks by the true public, which a Conservative journal burlesqued not much when it said that one was “no one shall drive a tandem of tigers in a park,” nor will I dwell upon the refusal of Parliament to admit within the parks public vehicles of any kind; but I would refer for a moment

to the rules with regard to public meetings which were contained in the Bill, and to the reasons which seem to me to have led to the adoption of those rules. Hyde Park is a very large tract of ground. It is, with Kensington Gardens, a single park nearly three miles long and more than one mile broad. Public meetings have been held there from time to time as long as any one can remember. They are held in the middle of the park, and in a place where they are inconvenient to no one. No one visiting the park in any ordinary way would ever come near the spot where they are held, which is far removed from any path or road, unless he went there for purposes of curiosity. Well, merely because the meetings there held are generally of a democratic character, and consequently obnoxious to people in society, it was proposed to take powers in this Bill to forbid them altogether. That provision, with much regret, its authors dropped; but the compromise arrived at was that instead of the words standing thus in the Bill, "No address shall be delivered," they should stand thus, "No address shall be delivered except in accordance with the rules of the park"; and we had a further promise that meetings should be only regulated, and not forbidden, by these rules. With that promise we were fain to be content, although our contentment was not perhaps of a very patient kind, and although we certainly did not accept the compromise until we had exhausted every means of preventing its becoming law. But what occurred? Within a week of the time when Parliament was to be prorogued, the rules under the Bill came forth, and to our wonder we found that one of the rules, all of which were vexatious, was the following:—"That the names and addresses of all speakers at any meeting to be held should be sent to some authority,"—who, as far as we can make out, would be a tribunal constituted of Mr. Ayrton and the Duke of Cambridge, that is to say, of the Ranger and the Commissioner of Works. Now, is it possible to imagine that in a case like this, where no necessity for any dealing with the question had been shown, it should be seriously proposed that a rule should be adopted which, if it were to be obeyed, would absolutely prevent the moving of any amendment at any meeting that might be held, would prevent anything but a mere cut and dried discussion, and would turn the right of public meeting in the parks into

a farce? It is clear that the object aimed at was indirectly to prohibit public meetings altogether; and on the mere chance of attaining such an object persons could be found who were prepared to sanction rules so wanton, so ridiculous, and, I may say, so criminal as these. I say "criminal," because, looking to the almost impossibility of enforcing them, and to the certainty that, unless stringently enforced, they will persistently be broken, there is every chance that such rules, made without the smallest proved necessity, would lead to riot.

No one can wonder at the continual pressure exercised by the agricultural interest in both Houses to increase and to retain the restrictions on the importation of foreign cattle, with the protective effect of keeping up the price of meat, and benefiting the agricultural interest of England at the expense of the consumer. There is nothing more strange in modern political history than the fact that the Government, which is more distinctly composed of free traders than any Government which has ever before existed, should carefully have abstained from making any attempt to complete a free trade policy, and should also, after having in the last Parliament resisted violently, and with an undue use even of the forms of the House of Commons, a measure for the erection of markets at the ports of entry, which would, they said, have had the effect of artificially protecting English cattle and raising the price of food, have been themselves the strongest upholders of similar restrictions. At the same time, it is not only the restrictions on importation that cause the high price of meat. English game preservation and Highland deer forests are responsible for some portion of the evil.

It is often said there would be far less class legislation than there is at the present time if only all classes were represented in the House of Commons—that is, represented at all, without regard to the number of representatives or the proportion of representatives which they might have. Now, I doubt whether the mere presence of one or of ten miners, for instance, in the House would have prevented the mangling of the Mines Bill on Mr. Staveley Hill's amendment, or whether the presence of one or of ten town workmen would have prevented the acceptance of the Lords' amendments to the Trades Union Bill. What is needed is, not merely that all men should be heard, but that they should be heard in proportion to their

numbers, and to the amount of happiness or misery which will be caused by any decision that may be taken in reference to their affairs. Now look, for instance, as a justification of what I say, and as an example of what I mean, to that which has occurred in reference to the hours of polling. In Committee on the Elections Bill, the views of the inhabitants of the large towns, and especially of those of them who work all day long at places far distant from those where they have to vote, were fairly and fully stated in both Houses; still, this fact did not prevent those views being wholly disregarded from mere carelessness, in spite of the absence of any strong interest in the opposite direction on anybody's part, and merely because they were not views supported by a sufficient body. Nothing can have been more grotesque than the treatment which the subject received from both Houses of the Legislature and from the Government itself. In 1870, although no division occurred, the Government were known to be opposed to any change. In 1871, they voted against the extension of the polling hour to eight o'clock. In the present year they did the same thing, but they promised to propose a compromise at a later stage of the Bill. They did propose that compromise; but finding some opposition to it in the House, they not only withdrew it, but when we objected to the withdrawal, they voted against their own proposal. The Bill then went up to the Lords, leaving the hours as they stood, and in the Lords, Lord Shaftesbury, after speaking with great courage, carried a proposal for extension. The Government then, at a later stage of the Bill in the Lords, proposed, instead of Lord Shaftesbury's accepted proposition, their own compromise, against which they had previously voted in the other House. They carried that compromise in the Lords, and then proposed in the House of Commons that we should agree to it; but finding again some opposition to it in that House, they refused to challenge the decision of the House upon that proposition, and when we challenged the decision for them, they showed such irresolution that we were beaten; so that matters remain as they were. I venture to say that such treatment of a subject which excites the greatest attention in the largest towns could never be continued, and would never have been dreamt of at all, had the great towns that share of the representation to which they are entitled.



Hitherto we have been considering the proceedings of the Commons. Let us now turn to those of the Lords. The Government are often invited to introduce their measures in the first place into the House of Lords, in order to utilize the services of that body, and to prevent alike the waste of its time at the beginning of a session, and the pressure on it at the close. A Bill was introduced there this year to regulate enclosures for the future, and to prevent that absolute exclusion of the poor from any advantage by enclosures which has hitherto occurred. It was a Bill far from complete, but one which made, although with the greatest tenderness towards the lords of manors, a certain improvement in the existing law. To show you the need for some such Bill, I may state the fact, well known to those who take any interest in the commons question, that out of 600,000 acres that have been enclosed since the Commission was appointed, only 2,000 acres have been allotted under the provisions of the original Act to the labouring poor. When this Bill came before the House of Lords, the Duke of Richmond, the leader of the Conservative party in that House, stated that the public had no right whatever in the commons, and that he objected to the making of any allotment to them; and he ultimately succeeded in throwing out the Bill. When he says, however, that the public have no right in the commons, and that the whole right is in the lords of manors, I should be prepared to take the opposite view. In every case that has been tried before the courts in modern times, the rights of the public as against those of the lords have been supported in the decisions. The lords have to enclose, either by a process which, when we have succeeded in raising sufficient funds we have never failed to prevent, or under the Enclosure Commissioners—that is, by the aid of Parliament, which of itself is enough to show what is the value of their so-called right.

Another remarkable piece of absence of public spirit seems to me to have been exhibited by the House of Lords in their rejection of the measure for applying the ballot to the School Board elections, which was a natural and proper supplement to the Ballot Bill, and one which, for the sake of consistency, as well as for any good which it might have in itself, ought clearly to have been passed in the same session. Far worse was Lord Abinger's resolution of the 18th of June, by which



a House containing in its ranks between fifty and sixty officers, or former officers of guards, pronounced a vote of sympathy with guardsmen and jealousy of the scientific corps.

You will understand that I am not attacking the Lords, as a body, any more than the Commons, as a body. At the same time, I cannot but take notice, in passing, of the fact that Lord Salisbury's words on the second reading of the Ballot Bill this year go to the very root of the constitution. He tells us that the House of Commons cannot be taken to represent the nation except on the special subject on which it was chosen. There are some of us who will not gainsay it. But if it be true, to what does the assertion point?—to annual Parliaments, of course; and some day Lord Salisbury will learn that, to show that the House of Commons does not represent the country, is not, therefore, at once to demonstrate that it is any better represented in the Lords.

Both Houses habitually show a small regard for public convenience in the short duration of their session. There was something careless and idle in the rejection last year by the Lords of the Ballot Bill, without consideration, upon the score of time; but there was more than carelessness in the dropping by us of the Mines Bill for a similar reason. I do not mean to say that the Lords are any worse than the Commons on this score. It is a matter of course with us that the session should end when the shooting begins. But I do mean to say that in both Houses it is a public scandal that any such reasons for the ending of the session should have weight, when year by year Parliament is collecting into its hands more and more completely the whole government of the country, in matters both great and small. In no country is so much power committed to one assembly. Other countries have the State Legislature, the Cantonal Council, the Departmental General Council, or the Provincial Zemstvoe, to deal with local matters. Here there is nothing of the kind. Parliament does all that is done, if not all there is to do. We pass Bills by the hundred about piers and roads, and turnpikes and tolls and bridges, and go through a mass of business of this kind, which we do badly, but which at least we prevent other people doing; and it is infamous, if this work is to be done by us at all, that the doing of it should be crowded into a corner of the year. Then, again, day by day Parliament is

assuming more and more interference power in foreign affairs and in criminal jurisdiction. I do not mean to say that, in home matters, it is advisable that this power should be exercised, but if it is to be exercised at all it is of the greatest importance that it should be exercised steadily, and throughout the entire year. In this matter of time, we of the House of Commons do not come before you with clean hands, and we have no right to complain of the House of Lords, but you have a right to complain of both. Not only of the too long vacation, but of such a sacrifice of public business to private pleasure—not of the purest kind—as is meant by an adjournment for the Derby, with all the effect of giving national sanction to the sport of horse-racing that such an adjournment involves.

It is hardly possible to take up a paper any morning without finding case after case of disregard of the opinions and feelings either of the minority or of the unknown and unheard dumb majority, constituting what I should call class government. For instance, on the last day but one of the session, the newspapers contained several cases of this kind, which were treated very much as a matter of course. One Minister defended, as a perfectly harmless joke, the speech of the Bishop of Gloucester, Dr. Ellicott, made at an agricultural dinner, in answer to the toast, “The Bishop and Clergy of the diocese.” One would have thought that a prelate, speaking with the authority of his position, in answer to a toast expressing the feeling entertained by the laity of his own part of the country towards those who in that part of the country were the official expounders of Christianity, would have avoided a bitter and uncharitable attack upon a man like Canon Girdlestone, than whom no man deserves better of those who have truly Christian feelings at heart, and that he would have avoided, too, an invitation to his neighbours to duck in a horse-pond any one who told labourers getting 10s. a week that they were underpaid. I have heard it said that primitive Christianity was more or less communistic in its character, but that is clearly not the case with Christianity in its modern development, because, if I mistake not, the Bishop who stated that a labourer with 10s. a week was by no means underpaid, receives from the country 100% a week himself, and has the patronage of

eighty-six benefices, worth over 20,000*l.* a year. The Bishop of Gloucester said that he "could not condemn in too strong terms, or denounce too severely, those who came from afar, men who never owned an acre, men who never did a day's work, into their peaceful villages, making iniquitous combinations." Now, I dare say it is true that the gentleman to whom he was alluding (Mr. Mitchell) never owned an acre, but the statement that he never did a day's work is a gratuitous invention. Mr. Mitchell, by his own labour, raised himself from the condition of a ploughman to that of a prosperous master stone-mason in London, and he voluntarily devoted a year of his time and many hundreds of his property to the movement which in these extraordinary terms the Bishop condemned. But I confess that it does seem strange that a man who, in his devotion to the happiness of his fellow men, is a model even to a Bishop, should be recommended by the Bishop to the people of his diocese as a fitting subject for immersion in a horse-pond, and that for forming unions among the labourers with a view, by peaceable and legal means, to raise their condition, he should be accused of devising an iniquitous combination. And this is a Bishop and a scholar! Verily we shall have to impose upon scholars as towards peasants the prohibition Browning addressed to peasants on behalf of scholars:—

"Hans must not burn Kant's house above his head  
Because he cannot understand Kant's book."

"Increased wages mean only increased drunkenness," said this follower of one who was the comforter of the poor; and he wound up his harangue with some dogmatical enunciations of half truths which he seemed to dare his auditors to dispute or to improve. "This is my doctrine," as said Mahomet, "and all other doctrine is either the same, in which case it is superfluous, or the opposite, in which case it is heretical." Now, this prelate is not only a prelate, but a legislator too, and with power by his vote and voice in the House of Lords to give effect to his opinions. The answer of a Minister who made light of this case was one subject treated of in the paper of the morning of which I speak. In another part of the same paper we find another Minister telling Mr. Anderson, when he asks him if he

approves of a volunteer being dismissed from his corps by his commanding officer and the Duke of Cambridge for attending a political meeting as a mere citizen, and not as a volunteer or in uniform, not that he approves and not that he disapproves, but that it is a matter within the discretion of the commanding officer. The same Minister, again on the same day, when Sir Wilfrid Lawson asked him whether a corporal at Gosport had been sentenced by court martial to three months' imprisonment with hard labour, and to be degraded to the rank of a private, for taking part in a religious service against his Colonel's wishes, said that the man was sentenced for disobedience to orders, and when he was asked what orders, he said that he didn't know; and there he wished, without any further expression of opinion, to leave the subject. Well, day after day, matters of importance not only to the individual, but to the public at large, to the unknown portion of the public, are thus shelved in Parliament. Again, in the same paper, another Bishop approves of the punishment of a poor parson by a clergyman of more power for obedience to the law. We need not wonder at this bigotry in high places. In all, people not bigots are as rare as black swans.

With such evidence of class power in Parliament and out, how can we wonder that taxation questions, local and imperial, are solved in a class sense? How little has been done in the direction of the free breakfast-table, considering the unexampled prosperity of the country, since it was promised by Mr. Bright, and voted for, be it remembered, by the electors in sending the present Government to power! How surely—if we turn from imperial to local taxation—do the Conservative magnates count on victory next session—victory for the land! How, indeed, with such views prevailing, can local taxation and county government be fairly dealt with next year? What hope can we have that such will be the case, when we remember that, although a Radical Government has been in office for four years, it has not touched the rooted feudalism of English county government, cumbrous and inefficient as it is? Still we suffer nominated lords-lieutenant, nominated magistrates, and nominated sheriffs, to rule the unheard peasants, and to tax them too. I have the fullest confidence in Mr. Gladstone's desire to



settle county government on the most modern and the most popular, which are also the most scientific, principles; but I doubt his power to beat the squirearchy, Liberal as well as Tory; and unless the squirearchy be beaten, the reform will be marred.

In face, then, of the refusal of Parliament to extend the hours of polling, of the refusal of both Houses to relieve candidates of the necessary expenses of elections, in face of the refusal of the House of Commons to abolish sinecures, I ask how can you expect to obtain any of the points which are included in every democratic programme? Mr. Morley lately called a conference of the leaders of the London democracy, and after much deliberation a programme was proposed of a most Radical kind, and was adopted by the bodies represented at the Cannon Street Hotel. There was to be a wider suffrage, shorter Parliaments, redistribution of political power, payment of members, abolition of all remaining property qualifications, abolition of the game laws, abolition of indirect taxation, reduction of expenditure, free and compulsory education, repeal of the Criminal Laws Amendment Act, and so forth; and the great majority of those present being of Republican opinions, a clause was inserted setting forth that, while content to work for these objects, the committee reserved their larger views. But how is the committee going to obtain for us all these good things? Where are the means? Mr. Morley is not dictator; how, then, are those who have met together under Mr. Morley's presidency going to get their way? Without going into details, I would sum up the generally accepted portions of the democratic programme under the following heads:—free schools, free church, free land, free trade, cheap law; and I want to know how and from whom you are going to obtain these things? Are you going to get free schools from rich men—free church from two houses of state churchmen—free land from landowners—cheap law from lawyers—free trade, which means less taxes, from officers and place-men? Why such is the strength of caste,—of caste theological—of caste official—of caste social,—that even with the Liberals in power, you have had fresh increase of estimates—fresh imposition of religious disabilities.

I am not one of those who flatter the populace by talking of the demoralization of the rich or great. I think that there is profound political demoralization—that is, terrible lack of



public spirit—in all classes, and in all countries, I would add. All I say is, that in an elective or parliamentary system, if improvement is to come, it must needs come by pressure from below, and that for the present, until improvement comes, all of us must be content to take our share of blame. What have we, of the present Parliament, done since the last elections? We have had four long years. How have we used them? We gave one year to the passing of an Irish Church Bill, that came thirty years too late, and that laid down principles of compensation that will be disastrous when they come to be applied to the Church of England. One year we gave to an Irish Land Bill, which violated economic principle without contenting the Irish peasantry; and to an English Education Act, which—valuable only for its compulsory powers—has not caused the real application of compulsion anywhere at present. One year we gave to abolishing an illegal system with compensation to those who had broken the law; and this year, with much triumph, we have succeeded in passing three imperfect measures:—an imperfect Ballot Bill—how imperfect we have seen at Preston, an imperfect Mines Bill, and an imperfect measure of Scotch Education.

Sometimes, indeed, a reform on which the country has set its mind has been carried by us, but carried in a different sense to that intended. The abolition of purchase was carried, but the country meant “*la carrière ouverte aux talents*,” and it has got instead, advancement open to merit, provided only that merit be rich enough to afford band subscriptions, and mess subscriptions, and to live on nothing at all except the private wealth of its possessor.

What I mean, then, by class legislation, is the legislation of a ruling class which is partly a land-owning class, and partly a mill-owning class, and very generally a dilettanti class, or a class “too fine for its work”; and I say that I am persuaded that had our Government been less exclusive, and more popular, we should neither have had the Alabama three-and-a-quarter millions to pay, nor Ireland made impossible to hold without armed force.

What, then, is the cure? To find it we must first discover where lies the root of the most pressing evils. Some say it is with the peerage, some find it in the monarchy. Let us look

twice before we leap. In Great Britain we are at this moment, politically speaking, in a transition state. We have a House of Commons possessed of all the realities of power, but indefinitely obstructed as to time by a land-holding Upper House, and itself connected with land as to the majority of its members, although in part democratically elected. The Government is a cumbersome republic, administered by landowners, through inconvenient and obsolete fictions: a republic of which the Premier is the head, not for any fixed period, but so long only as he in turn is content to be the humble slave of a fluctuating majority of millowners or landowners in the House of Commons. The Monarchy, although cumbersome, and likely to become, as all fictions at some time in their existence will become, dangerous, is for political purposes administered by a commission, which we call the Cabinet, and represents only the majority of the House of Commons. The House of Commons is elected under democratic forms, and by a tolerably wide suffrage. How, then, is it that we suffer all the evils of class government? The Peers being neither democratically elected like the Commons, nor powerless like the Monarchy, some people at once assume that it must be the Peers who are the authors of all evil. Abolish the House of Lords, they say, and the cry has often been raised within this city. The cry has been raised, indeed, at times by those who, with the conservative solemnity of age, now reprove others for raising the standard of Radical Reform. Mr. Roebuck has lately begged at Sheffield that his former constituents would forget the errors of his youth; yet I know not why they should refuse to remember when he stands up for the Lords, that once upon a time he wrote—"The Lords have a direct interest in fleecing the people; all persons who have a similar interest rally round the Lords, and, for this reason, the House of Peers is the most powerful of the sinister interests now existing in this country." Reform the Peers or put them away, is the cry that now each year sees raised. To begin with, the thing is much more easily said than done. I have never seen a reform of the Lords suggested which would not either strengthen them or corrupt the Commons, or do both these things. Besides, we need an immediate remedy applicable to the existing state of things. Suppose that you expel the Bishops from the Lords; suppose that you

elect life peers ; the House of Lords will still continue to be a house of great landowners and of State churchmen so far as the majority of its members are concerned. You never can work election, which means selection for merit, by the side of hereditary right ; you never can work nomination, which means jobbery, by the side of either. It seems, then, to me, that reserving our future action, and declaring boldly our personal views as to the ultimate form which the federal government of Great Britain and Ireland, in our opinion, should assume, those of us who are dissatisfied with the existing constitution of Parliament should, for immediate reforms, turn our attention rather to the Lower House than to the Upper House or to the Crown. I have made no secret of my opinions, and I know that they are those of many here. I believe, with Lord Brougham, that, "When a people become wise enough to avoid splitting into parties and fighting for who shall be king, they are wise enough to govern themselves, and the great use of monarchy is at an end." But I have, on the other hand, never ceased to say that the majority of the people of Great Britain believe that the reforms which they desire are compatible with the monarchic form of government. Whether they are right, or whether the pure Republicans are right, time and the peaceful development of our united countries alone can show ; but while political education is progressing as rapidly as at present, I think that the staunchest of Republicans need not fume or fret "because," to use the words of Robert Buchanan, a Glasgow poet,—

" . . . the tinsel order stands  
A little longer yet."

"Parliamentary reform," I seem to hear some say—why we have had it five years ago. Give the country rest. Why can't you let us alone a little ? We know things can't always go on as they are, but give us a few years. Whose fault is it that we cannot. We answer,—Yours ! You who so tied the reforming hands, who so cramped them in their work, that they produced a miserable piece of political patchwork instead of a lasting reform.

Compare the electoral laws of any other country with ours. It matters not whether you take that of France, of the United States, of Italy, of Prussia, of Spain. Take our nearest

neighbour—France. A new Bill is now pending, proposed by Government, and likely to be adopted during the next session of the Assembly. I take its provisions, but those of the old law are as simple. "Every Frenchman, aged 21, is an elector, and to vote at any particular spot must have lived at it for one year, which fact he may prove at any time before the day of the election, and have his name placed on the register by the local authority." Nothing more! that is all! On the other hand, our electoral law is contained in a book full of Acts of Parliament, all alike unintelligible except to lawyers, and in heaven knows how many reported cases tried before the Judges, and which no one but a lawyer will even pretend to understand. We have for School Boards one franchise, with ballot voting in London and open voting in the country. For Town Councils another franchise. For London Vestries a third franchise. For Boards of Guardians a fourth franchise. For county parliamentary elections five more franchises, and for borough elections five more different franchises; for coroners another franchise; which makes about fifteen, with about as many various necessary periods of residence and different modes of registration; the whole with the effect of throwing our elections into the hands of wire pullers, and of virtually disfranchising the democracy. Try and explain the English electoral system to a foreigner, and see at the end of the explanation what you think of it yourself. Look at the anomalous condition of things in London, where you have a mass of boroughs that have no more to do with one another in electoral law than if they were in different countries, so that a man is disfranchised for years by moving across his street. Look at your registration law, by which a voter is disfranchised for moving from one room to a better room in the same house and on the same floor. Look at the necessary costs of conducting an election thrown on candidates. Look at your law of election petitions, made by the rich for the rich, in which, however plain the proof of wholesale bribery, the election cannot be upset unless at least 2,000*l.* can be procured; that is, unless the beaten candidate be also a wealthy man. Look even at your new Ballot Bill, which, as worked at Preston, has proved but a new engine for putting political power into the hands of the rich.

Parliamentary representation commenced, or was revived

in England in the thirteenth century, but it was not until the fifteenth that any qualification for the voter was required. At that time the election was made by show of hands at a single spot, and the restriction in the franchise was only intended to prevent the bringing together of too great a crowd upon those occasions. As regarded towns, for a great number of years new towns were represented, on their reaching a sufficient population, by the mere act of the Crown, so that there existed, in the earliest days in which anything resembling the present constitution was in force, on the one hand universal suffrage, on the other a periodical re-adjustment of the distribution of political power. Moreover, in those days Parliaments were elected every year; and it may be said with truth, that the history of modern Parliamentary Reform is only the history of a series of attempts, more or less successful, to return to the most ancient practices of the constitution. The first of these measures of reform, the Act of 1832, contained no firm ground of principle, either in the matter of the franchise, or in that of distribution of political power; and the result was that it made no essential change in the character of Parliament. The second reform, that of 1867 and 1868, went upon principle as far as the suffrage was concerned in boroughs, and by so doing conceded the advisability of similarly basing ourselves upon principle in the future as regards county franchise and distribution of seats. As to county franchise, there is a general agreement that it should be lowered to the same point as that in boroughs, and a general belief that such a change would not be opposed by either party, or by any leading statesman. It is a matter of time and of convenience, and nothing more. But there is a widely different outlook as regards the distribution of political power. Here we have never touched principle at all, and hitherto we have hardly seen it upon the political horizon. No one likes to be a party to a measure of disfranchisement. No one who knows the inconveniences of the present size of the House of Commons would be a party to increasing the number of members of that House; and most men are afraid of those schemes by which it has been proposed to adjust representation to population without disfranchisement.

I stated that in 1867 and 1868, when redistribution measures passed, they were founded upon no principle. For



Ireland, where such a measure was most needed, there was none at all. There was a slight enfranchisement of new boroughs, but such towns as Battersea and Croydon remained unheard, although some 200 smaller places return each a member to the House of Commons, and some fifty smaller places return two a-piece. In Ireland, before the last Reform Bill, borough electors were only 30,000 men : they are not 50,000 now—a number ridiculously small, and a number, too, which shows that in ascertaining the wishes of the Irish people we must rely rather upon county than upon borough representation. There are nine Irish boroughs returning nine members to the House with only 2,000 electors among the nine—Portarlington, which has 136, Kinsale, which has 173, Mallow, Ennis, New Ross, Dungannon, Downpatrick, Youghal, and Tralee. Now, we are very fond in this country of talking of the sovereignty of the people, but I confess that I cannot see why an elector in Portarlington should be 120 times as much sovereign as an elector of Glasgow. Many of the small boroughs have been proved corrupt ; moreover, those who are acquainted with them know that there should be counted as corrupt not only those of which positive corruption has been proved, but many also as to which—while there is no proof—there is for any fair man a certainty that the mass of the voters take bribes. The result must be the gradual exclusion from our political life of all except men of an unscrupulous ambition and men who have private interests to serve. Above all, it is grossly unfair to the inhabitants of the large towns when their interests come into conflict with the interests of those who live in the small boroughs. In these cases the small boroughs obtain their ends, on account of the disproportionate power that is given to them in Parliament. The Conservatives, who maintain these boroughs, say that political power should be given, not to numbers, but to property and to intelligence ; but by upholding pocket boroughs and corrupt boroughs they, in practice, place the representation in the hands of the majority of the corrupt and uneducated and unenlightened inhabitants of those decaying towns. The result is, that while the House of Commons is ever assumed to be representative of the whole people, it is, in fact, representative only of a portion of the people—representative of that portion in irregular degree ;

and its majority is as often a mere class majority as is the majority of the non-elected House of Lords. The Conservatives often cry out that the counties should have more members, and that, perhaps, is true, taking the counties as a whole ; but, on the other hand, you have special representation given to counties such as Sutherland, where the whole county, except one small estate, belongs to a single duke, and where the number of electors is but something above three hundred. Half the members of the House of Commons are elected by much over two millions of electors, while the other half are elected by much under half a million. Not only—as Mr. Mill, I think, once put it—has a fraction of the community alone the right to vote, but a majority of the House is returned by a small fraction of that fraction ; and the result is this, that the opinion of the country is often falsified upon great divisions, and that made into law which, if the unbiassed opinion of voters had its way, would never have become law at all. For instance, take only two divisions, to which I have already to-night alluded as having occurred this year—that upon the Birmingham Sewage Bill, and that upon Mr. Staveley Hill's amendment to limit the penalties of masters in the case of the employment of children in mines. In the latter of these, the 185 who voted with Mr. Staveley Hill in favour of the mine-owners, represented far fewer voters than did the 170 who voted upon the other side ; and in the former, those who voted with Sir C. Adderley and Sir R. Peel in favour of the extremest assertion of the rights of property, and against the principle of taking property, with compensation, for public purposes, represented almost half a million fewer voters than did those who voted in favour of public considerations. Last year, on two occasions of much importance, a majority also was converted into a minority in the House of Commons. In the division against the most insidious form of electoral corruption, viz., the large employment of paid canvassers, this was the case ; and so again in the division upon the Contagious Diseases Act. It is clear, I think, that we have no security that the opinion of the country will not, on any given occasion, be falsified in the House. No one who looks into the figures contained in our electoral statistics can come to any conclusion but that they form an outrage upon common sense. So small is the influence of the single voter in the largest of large boroughs,

as compared with that of the voter in the smallest of the small, that it is hard to see why the former should trouble himself to vote at all, except he find some local or temporary pleasure in the act of voting, apart altogether from its bearing upon the political position. Not only inconvenience but danger lie under such a system. Inconvenience within the last year or two in the loss of measures of much importance, I have shown; and I might show it spread over a whole course of years, and lying in the way of the adoption of a whole line of policy; for instance, in the delaying for many years the adoption of Free Trade, to which a majority of the people were favourable long before a majority of representatives were secured. It is clear that danger would be found to underlie the system, whenever—and for aught we know it may soon happen—a party unpopular in the large cities but having, nevertheless, a majority in the small towns and smaller counties, may attempt to, carry on the government, and even to undo some of the progress of the last few years. The floods which at Niagara take the tremendous plunge, descend to unknown depths beneath the other waters into which they fall, but though they flow unseen for miles, at length for sure they re-appear once more upon the surface,—so, for certain, you may count upon the re-appearance of the Conservatives in power after their long plunge of 1867 and 1868. When I see Mr. Disraeli sitting in a mysterious and majestic solemnity watching Mr. Cardwell's difficult army reorganization, or Mr. Stansfeld's masterly attempts to improve our local administration, and think that soon he in power will know how to profit by reforms which he has neither aided nor opposed, I am tempted to think of the carp of Fontainebleau, who are fed by the throwing in of hard meat balls, which they have to break by driving them against the stone. The great king fish holds himself aloof, and allows the smaller fry to do the breaking work, then in he sails, and driving them away with a blow of his tail, proceeds to devour that for which he has not toiled. What, however, when in office, is he going to “conserve,” unless it be the reforms of his predecessors? “If a man is right,” says Josh Billings, “he can't be too Radical, but if he is wrong, he can't be too Conservative,”—so Conservatism is safe, and so is silence. Of Mr. Disraeli's silence, however, we should remember that the albatross, which of all birds is

the one that has the most powerful wings, is also of all the one which flaps and beats them the least, and Mr. Disraeli's policy may still astonish us once more. To be serious : we show great political and social danger : we show the rejection of important Bills and the mangling of others desired by the people : we show a vastly too great influence of landowners and millowners, of whom the former already rule absolute in another co-ordinate House of the Legislature : we show that there is no other country in the world where representatives are not assigned in equal proportion to population in each district : we show that in England the over-represented portions of the country, if you take population as your test, are also the poorest and the least intelligent.

Many seem to think that they have said enough against any proposition for a wide redistribution of political power, if they merely state that they object, in the matter of such distribution, to the considering of nothing except mere numbers. Now what, when we think it over, can such a statement really mean ? One would imagine, from the way in which they put the case, that it is intelligence or property which they would wish to represent, instead of numbers ; but without going into the question of the desirability of such a basis for representation, it is clear at once that, if they are supporters of the existing state of things, which by resisting change they seem to be, they certainly are not maintaining that which provides for a clearer representation of intelligence or property than an equal system based on numbers. Without going into details in a hostile sense, it may be taken as admitted, that there is not more intelligence or more property, voter for voter, in Portarlington or Kinsale than in the city of Glasgow. But putting such considerations out of sight, I want to know what right you have to consider anything except mere numbers ? By the whole theory of the constitution, it is the people, and not any particular portion of them, who are supposed to be represented in the Commons House : privilege is sufficiently represented in the other House. The people, who have each one his life and his limb, and each one his occupation and his family, and his trade interests, within the control of the law, and each of whom is taxed for the support of Government—they are those whom you are supposed to consult, and whom I think you are bound to



consult, both in fairness and with a view to the protection of the best interests of the State. A great deal was heard, a few years ago, of virtual representation; but that doctrine is now dead, except as applied to women. The franchise in the towns is wide enough to admit the great majority of grown men, and that is likely soon to be the law in the counties; but of what avail to equalize the franchise as long as such differences in the weight of votes continue?

I do not undervalue the admission of the peasants to a share in the government of the State. The marked separation caused by the difference of franchise between borough and county representatives, may one of these days prove hurtful. There is great social danger in excluding from the franchise in the counties a class of persons whom you include in the boroughs. I maintain that it is neither just nor expedient to exclude them. Unjust, for it is injustice to withhold from a man the privilege of having his vote counted in the government of his State, and it is an injustice which you have no right to commit except to prevent some greater evil. You prolong the degradation of a portion of the community when you exclude them from the franchise as unworthy to possess it;—when you refuse to confer upon them full rights of citizenship, because you maintain that it would be dangerous to bestow them. There was something tangible in the position of those who used to say that in counties and boroughs alike you must have a money test. That is a view which I do not share, but it is a view which I can comprehend. But I fail to grasp the standpoint of those who, while they exclude a numerous class of their fellow-countrymen from the franchise, admit, however, the corresponding class in other and indistinguishable portions of the land. I say “indistinguishable portions,” because the distribution of your franchise is capricious—although one would naturally expect that if it be necessary to have a qualification, the qualification should be the same in one place as in another. There was in 1867 a general agreement upon both sides as to the desirability of admitting to the House the representatives of the working classes in the towns. Why not in the counties too? What argument that was used then as to towns, is not as applicable to counties now? There are other and fresh ones that might be used. How are you going to

work educational compulsion in the counties unless you give the labourers votes? How are you going to work your new schemes of local government and of sanitary legislation? How are you going even to discuss those Bills when you have not in the House a single member who understands the position of the agricultural labourer, and whose interests are not opposed to his? So long as you retain a money franchise in the counties, you are exposed to the unpreventible danger of the manufacture of sham votes. Again, with one franchise in your towns and another in your counties, you find people building mills and manufactories outside the limits of the towns, in order to escape municipal rates; you find their workmen living outside the boundaries; and you find that men who differ in no way from their comrades within the towns are thus accidentally excluded.

Now I venture to say that the most miserable country house and the most wretched country occupier, are palaces and aristocrats as compared with the worst town dwellings and most wretched town occupiers whom you have enfranchised by your law. If your town workman, living in a 20% house, goes outside of the borough in order to live in a 10% house—which is more airy, better built, and better drained—you disfranchise him for that act of providence and foresight, and you do so upon no principle. You disfranchise him upon a money test. Now, these money tests are not of a character which makes it possible that in modern times they should be permanently maintained. There is no monopoly of intelligence reducible to a money test. Why, then, a monopoly of electoral rights? You are afraid, doubtless, that however indefensible your tests, if you give them up you will destroy what you consider the legitimate influence of property. I doubt it. Look at Lancashire! Property has not only a corrupt and artificial influence, but it has, too, a wider influence, that will not be destroyed or shaken, but which may be even strengthened, by the admission to the franchise of a more dependent class. But their dependence is no reason for their exclusion. To exclude them on account of their dependence, is to place yourselves within the vicious circle, for you may be certain that the dependence will continue as long as you continue the exclusion. While the franchise in borough or county remains the possession, not of the whole people, but

of a class, so long we fail to call out that which it is our duty to exalt, but upon which at least it ought to be our strength and our satisfaction to rely—the whole power of the State springing from the entire people. The greater the number of those you admit to the franchise, the wiser, as I contend, will be our deliberations, but for certain the more powerful and respected our voice, the more powerful, not only at home, but, for good, as I hope and believe, abroad. Now, when you counsel, now, when you mediate, it is not the advice nor the interposition of your people, but of a portion of your people only. For my part, I am persuaded that the day will come when it will seem to our successors to have been inexplicable how any Legislature would deny to grown-up inhabitants, and still more to householders and tax-payers, the right to vote.

These milder reforms, which we are united to propose, are consistent with the Constitution: would tend only to make our Parliament a more accurate reflection of the nation's will. If they are long opposed by those who prate of their belief that the mass of the people are ready to range themselves on the side of leaving matters as they are, we, on our part, shall have reason to suspect that, after all, the people must have already come to see the desirability of sweeping changes, inasmuch as those who are interested in Class Legislation strive to make the constitution of Parliament as little representative as they can.

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## FREE SCHOOLS.

*Birmingham, 5th of November, 1872.*

MR. DIXON, LADIES, AND GENTLEMEN,—I need hardly tell you that I endorse all that the earlier speakers have said as to the folly of leaving our education policy to be decided at corrupt elections,—fought in the name of religion to the cry of “The Beer in our Bellies and the Bible in our Schools.” It is, however, of another side of the controversy that I am called to speak. Action must be taken in Parliament next year, not only on those branches of the subject to which allusion has this night been made, but on others too. When, for instance, Mr. Smith brings in his Bill to give to the guardians the power of remitting or of paying fees, why should not we then move a resolution in favour of free schools?

How pressing this question is! In July last the London School Board was occupied for a whole long summer’s afternoon in the consideration of five cases of supposed inability to pay school fees. One of them, which may be taken as typical of the whole, was that of a widow earning 6s. a week and having two children of school age. The London School Board found itself wholly unable to decide on principle the question which this case involved, and the subject was postponed till October, when it again came up. Mr. Charles Reed, on that occasion, said, it was admitted that direct and universal compulsion was essential; that hitherto the visitors had worked on parents who were able to pay school fees; that there was behind a vast mass of sheer inability to pay the fees; that it was undesirable that education should be provided through the channels of the Poor Law. True enough all this! What was the answer made? Dr. Rigg gravely assured the Board that the American free-school system had “had the worst results.” Well, that is a startling statement, and one which, if believed, would “have the



worst results." Four years ago there were three States of the American Union which had a system of partial payment of school fees. There is now not one. Connecticut abolished payment in 1868, Michigan in 1869, and New Jersey in 1872. The universal opinion of Americans who love their country is, that the very foundation of its greatness is in the free common school. I said just now that the question was a pressing one : more pressing now than ever at any time before. My friend here, Mr. Chamberlain, in moving a resolution on your School Board, pointed out that which must never be forgotten, namely, that the birth of School Boards was the death of those old free schools which formerly existed throughout the land.

Is it not, after all, the fact that the opposition on principle to free schools falls to the ground when once you concede the necessity of public aid to education ? That necessity has been admitted in this country for forty years. The school fee is but a small fraction of the whole cost of the child's schooling. When the public pays three-fourths or four-fifths of the cost, what principle is involved in the direct payment of one-fourth or of one-fifth by the parent, that payment not being in any way regulated by his income ? What is this but to substitute an exploded poll-tax for more scientific and modern methods of raising funds ?

It has been pointed out, with perfect wisdom as it seems to me, that the parents well know that the penny a week does not suffice, and that the public bears by far the greater portion of the cost. Now, there are only two ways of looking at this fact ; either that the payment by the public is a concession to the poverty of the parent, or that it is an admission that education is rather a public than a private concern. If the State payment is a concession to the parent's poverty, why should a widow with 6s. a week pay the same school fee for her child as a prosperous master blacksmith or thriving beer-shop-keeper making 3*l.* a week clear profits ? If, on the other hand, the payment by the public is to be taken as an admission of the principle that schooling is a public duty, then what becomes of the other so-called "principle" involved in the direct payment by the parent of any sum at all ? When Dr. Rigg's friends say that the parent who cannot pay the 1*d.* a week school fee is already a pauper, and had better be made

one formally, why should not they the rather say that the parent who cannot pay the 6*d.* total cost of his child's schooling, or the 3*s.* a week total cost of the schooling of his six children within the school age, is a pauper, and should be driven into the house at once? From this Dr. Rigg and his party shrink. What nonsense, then, this pauperism argument becomes! The School Board schools give, in many cases, education to the children of professional men, and their parents receive a direct benefit from the rates, but no one calls them paupers, and I cannot see why the case of parents whose children are wholly educated out of rates should be any different from theirs. I reject, too, the argument of cost, for, if the compulsory powers are to be really applied, and payment insisted on in all cases, parents will be driven to the workhouse or to prison, from which ratepayers are not likely to find relief, while the children are certainly less likely to become self-supporting members of the community.

The question before us must not be discussed as though it were one between paid-for education and free schools. The thousands of children in every town with whom the School Boards find themselves incompetent to deal, prove that the question lies, not between the parents paying and the complete freedom of the schools, but between the remission of fees in some shape or other and universal freedom. I say that the alternative lies between free schools and the remission of fees. Some may reply that there is a third course open, namely, to establish free schools for the very poor. But this establishment of special free schools is possible only in large towns. Looking, then, at the country as a whole, I repeat that we have to choose between a remission of fees and universal free schools; and I base that statement not only on what has fallen from the leading members of the chief School Boards, but also on the experience of foreign lands. In America, in one-third of Switzerland, in the great French town of Lyons, in the great German town of Berlin, the schools are free. In the rest of Switzerland, in the rest of Germany, in the three Scandinavian kingdoms, and in Finland, school fees are remitted in a great number of cases. In the remainder of the civilized world attendance at school is not enforced, and the question does not arise. In France, as shown by the late votes, the majority of the people are in favour of compulsory,

but free, education.\* We are justified, then, by the experience of foreign countries, and by the statements of the most experienced members of our School Boards, in saying that if you do not have free schools, you must carry very far indeed the principle of the remission of fees. Now, gentlemen who, like Mr. Llewellyn Davies, push the doctrines of Economic Science to the point at which they become mere fanaticism, fail to show that it is possible to avoid remission of fees, and fail, on the other hand, to defend remission by a single word. What is meant by "remission of fees"? The children are set apart to be stared at by the others, and are degraded by the speciality of their exemption. The parents are equally lowered in the moral scale by having to solicit the favour of exemption. You admit, too, the children of drunken and improvident men, and refuse free admissions to those self-denying persons who stint themselves of the very necessities of life in order to pay for the schooling of their children. You thus cause both justifiable discontent and avoidable degradation. On the other hand, if all schools receiving public aid were free, the system would be too widely spread to admit of the possibility of any degradation attaching either to parent or to child.

Why not take higher ground? Why not assert that schooling is in the broadest sense a public duty? The community suffers by ignorance in the individual. It interferes, therefore, partly to protect itself, and partly in a desire to secure the future welfare of the country. You conceded the public principle on the first day when you gave State help to education. You repeated your concession when you introduced compulsion. You will needs go further and complete your work. The country has decided for universal education. Universality cannot be secured except by means either of free schools or of the remission of fees. If it be secured by remission of fees, you will do more to demoralize your people by the remission than even universal education will do to raise them. On the other hand, if it be obtained by means of universal

\* The principle of free schools is making rapid strides. In his new work on Education, M. Émile de Laveleye says that it has been adopted by Spain (in 1868), Portugal, Italy, Chili, Norway, Denmark, Zurich, Queensland (in 1870), Prussia, by Article 24 of her new constitution, and the Sandwich Islands.

free schools, you will not only reap the direct gain of universality without deduction, but you will glean an after harvest of a moral fusion of classes and extinction of class hostility. When some of our friends talk of nationalizing the land of England, let us ask them first to nationalize the people that are to dwell in it. No such easy task, but one that must be undertaken if the ancient glories of England are to be models and not dreams.

We have nothing to hope for in this matter from the existing School Boards—nothing from the present Parliament; but I cannot but believe that the next time that the people are asked their voice it will be given for free common schools.\*

\* The following words by Martin Luther are worth appending to a speech upon Free Schools:—"Magistrates of the German towns, God bade us teach the children. Parents, whether by indifference, by ignorance, by overwork, neglect this Holy Command. It is your business to see to it. Does want of money stop you? You spend each year much on cross-bows and musquetoons, why not spend as much on giving schoolmasters to our youth?"

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## FREE LAND.

*Derby, 7th of January, 1873.*

ON the 9th of April of last year, Mr. William Fowler moved in the House of Commons the following resolution :—  
 “That in the opinion of this House the present state of the law as to entail and strict settlement of land discourages the investment of capital in the development of agriculture, to the great injury of all classes of the people.” Eighty-one members voted in favour of the resolution, 103 members voted the other way. The motion was consequently lost by a majority of 22. But those who voted in favour of it represented more voters in the constituencies than were represented by the majority.

It is hard to see what there is that can be said in favour of the present land law. No one denies that there is much difficulty in transferring land, and that the cost of transfer gives great advantage to the rich in the purchase of land as against the poor. A Royal Commission has admitted that our law of entail throws terrible impediments in the way of transfer, not to mention the objections to it on its own account, which I will presently explain. The burden of proof lies on those who defend our system, for nothing like it exists elsewhere. If that is one reason why the burden of proof should be thrown on them, there is another and a still stronger reason why that should be the case, namely, that it is an interference with the free and natural course of things, and requires to be defended upon the ground of its necessity.

Capital is not applied to land to that extent to which it is desirable that it should be applied, because the land is tied up by settlement in such a way that it is often in the hands of poor men—men who would do far better to sell their land to those who would have capital to apply to it. A large

portion of the area of the country is held by persons who have only a life interest, and they have not a sufficient motive to spend their money upon the land; and even if they had a motive they have not the money.

It will indeed, perhaps, be time to enter on a serious attack in detail upon the law of settlement, when somebody has attempted its defence. Mr. Beresford Hope is almost the only person of any note who defends entails. His view is this—that in the interest of the poor it is better that the old families should continue to possess the land, than that men who have made money by manufacture should buy it from them. If these were the only two alternatives, I am not sure he would be wrong. On the other hand, there can be no doubt that it is a bad thing for the country that great tracts of land should be occupied by men who cannot properly cultivate them, and who are unable by law to sell. One-half at least of the land of England is tied up in this way, and no one can doubt but that such a state of things is an artificial restriction upon the very life of the country. The real struggle is not over the evils of the existing state of things—it is over the remedy; and if we were agreed as to what that remedy should be, it would not be long before we should obtain it. But the differences between land reformers of the more moderate and of the more revolutionary school, have got to such a point, that each of those sections, if we are to believe their spokesmen, would sooner leave matters alone than adopt the remedies of the other.

It is not possible to occupy time more beneficially than by considering the opinions held by various sections of land reformers, and attempting to devise some safe and experimental middle course.

We have a powerful party, to which all middle class Liberals and many Conservatives belong—a party which would do away with the law of primogeniture, which would abolish long entails, and which would cheapen and simplify the transfer of land. At the other end of the scale we have the Land and Labour League, who advocate the nationalization of the land. These men have been unjustly attacked as having proposed dishonesty. I have never read any speech in which they have not coupled their idea of the nationalization of the land with declarations of their desire fully to

indemnify the proprietors who may be dispossessed; and it is a pity that writers who combat their views should increase the bitterness with which they view the existing institutions of society, by accusing those men of a wish for spoliation. The view that they hold is, that all land should be owned by the State, and let out by the State to tenants for long terms, the State receiving the rents. They differ among themselves as to the means by which the lands of the country should first be acquired by the State. Some of them would have the State as rapidly as possible expropriate and compensate the proprietors, and take all land to itself. Others would commence by limiting the power of bequest; but all alike would recognize existing interests, however acquired, in the same way in which those interests are recognized where land is already taken by Act of Parliament.

We saw just now that there is such antagonism between the two classes of reformers, that each of them would sooner leave matters as they are than adopt the remedies of their opponents. The ground taken by the Land and Labour League when they oppose the middle class reformers is, that if you cut up land into small patches owned by peasant proprietors, you will be creating a new class of persons, possessing new rights, who will require greater compensation than would be needed for the existing proprietors of the soil, and that you will indefinitely postpone that nationalization of the land which they have in view. The Association, under the presidency of Mr. Mill, to which Mr. Cox and myself both of us belong, advocates views which lie between the two extremes, and its programme seems to me to contain that which is most valuable in both plans. What is the view of the Land and Labour League in their desire to abolish private property in land? The chief of their objects is to take for the State the benefit of what may be called the accidental increase in the value of land, and to plant a considerable number of their fellow-countrymen as tenants of the State upon the soil. The Land Tenure Reform Association proposes, with its more moderate programme, to do both those things. It clearly is not necessary, in order to obtain for the State the natural increase in the value of land, that the State itself should be the actual owner of the land. A large part of the principle at stake would be conceded, and a large measure of the gain

reaped, if the State, by means of taxation, should take to itself the whole or part of the unearned increase of the value of the soil, leaving the soil itself in the hands of the proprietors, unless where they preferred to sell it at its market value to the State. It may be said that the proprietors would retain their land, and that the experiment of planting the people upon land as tenants of the State could not be tried. But another clause in the programme proposes to try this experiment upon lands which are already public. There are in this country enormous tracts of land in the hands of Colleges and Corporations, and if this experiment is to be tried at all, it should be tried at first on such lands as these.

In the bitter attack which Mr. Newmarch made at Leeds upon the principles of the Land Tenure Association, he said nothing about that one of them which had hitherto been the most opposed—namely, the interception for the benefit of the State of the future unearned increase of the rent of land, arising from the mere progress of the country in wealth and population, and springing into existence independently of any expenditure and of any act on the part of the proprietor of the soil. Now, as Mr. Newmarch, one of the greatest masters of the old political economy, has not specially attacked this portion of the scheme, it cannot require much defence. Those who have cried out “confiscation” are very much the same persons who opposed railways when Parliament first began to “confiscate” land for public purposes—that is to say, to take land without the consent of the proprietors, but compensating them for their loss. No political economist can venture to say that there is not an essential difference between land and any other kind of property—a difference the character of which at once is seen when we remember that land is the only kind of property which steadily and at all times continues to rise in value without any act done on the part of the proprietor.

Upon the other point—that of a public management of lands already public—I have nothing to add to that which I have said before. We are told always that State management would be corrupt; but the very same party tell us that Corporation management is corrupt; and as it is only Corporation land upon which, according to our scheme, the experiment is



to be tried at first, we could not be making matters any worse than they now are.

On the lands which are already public might be tried the experiment of small farms, not sold in absolute ownership of course, but let by the State upon long terms. It is strange that small farming, which is the rule in many countries under much less favourable conditions than those which here exist, is still but an experiment here, and one that is looked upon by many bigots as certain to fail when tried. Nearly all the old stock arguments against small farms have been given up. Those who attack them now assume that before the invention of agricultural steam machinery they would have been supporters of small farming, but that they have abandoned the cause only on account of the necessity of costly implements. But those who are for small farming believe that co-operation among the peasant-farmers would allow of the purchase and use of those machines, and that, too, is one of the experiments that must be tried.

The need for public management of public interests in land, as well as of public lands themselves, is shown by the impunity with which the interests of the public in common lands and in paths and ways may be stolen at the present time. Two hundred years ago one-half of England was common or commonable land. A vast proportion of this land was enclosed, without compensation, during the last century. Much of it has been enclosed, with partial compensation, during the present century, and a great quantity has been stolen. Many landowners, to use the words of an American, would seem to have been employed

“ . . . in preying till they busts  
On what the Government chooses,  
And in converting public lands  
To very ‘private uses.’ ”

Public opinion has, however, been aroused, and we have succeeded for three years in stopping the passing of what is styled the Annual Enclosure Act.

I am one of those who hope that enclosures may be almost put an end to. We have had Parliamentary inquiry, and we have shown that the compensation obtained on the extinction of common rights is compensation which the man who takes it may drink away, and that it is no compensation to his children ;

and those of us who have investigated the question, have come to the conclusion that there is no more pregnant cause of the degradation of the labourer than the loss of his common rights. There are some wild parts of England where enclosures cannot be resisted in the interest of the great towns; but as to those another set of considerations comes into play—namely, that in such places there is seldom any real increase in the production of the country to be gained by the enclosure. Such lands are already depastured by the cattle of the commoners, and being mostly poor lands would not be much improved by the enclosure. In such cases it will commonly be found that the enclosure is made with the view to the preservation of game. At least we should provide that no enclosure should be made otherwise than by Act of Parliament. We should then know exactly how we stand from year to year. Why not go further, and propose that the State should resume the commons, compensating, where need is, the lords of the manor for their rights? At all events, we should resist enclosures on the present plan. The land so enclosed will only go to swell the great estates, and it would be far better to hold these tracts over as a vast heritage for those who may come after us, who may be competent to deal with them on juster principles than are known to us.

The lords of the manor who have appropriated an enormous portion of English land were not the owners of that land, but only the possessors of certain rights over it. Had those men been compensated for the rights which they possessed, the land might have been kept in the hands of the public, with advantages which we can hardly estimate. Although we are not now able so easily to acquire public lands, nevertheless we should pause before we allow the process to be continued which converts the few public lands which still exist into the demesnes of individuals; and I entirely concur with the recent letter of Professor Fawcett to the *Times*, against the unreserved sale of Corporation lands; although he was not consistent with his principles when he failed to support some scheme for their public management.

It has been proved over and over again that there is much inefficient management on the part of Corporations, and one would have thought that those bodies would have been inclined to thank those who would give them public management, and

not only diminish the charges of many of the institutions, but leave the time and energies of their managers to be employed upon their proper work. They labour also under many disabilities. Though so-called "public bodies," it is shown by a recent correspondence between the Commons' Preservation Society and the Governors of Dulwich College, that they are wholly without power to grant any part of the "public" lands within their charge for public purposes.

I trust that I have succeeded in defending those articles of the programme of the Land Tenure Reform Association which require that lands needing an Act of Parliament to authorize their enclosure shall be retained for national uses, and that lands belonging to public bodies shall be made available for promoting small cultivation and co-operative agriculture, on the understanding that no such lands be suffered to come under private control. When we have succeeded in carrying such a reform as this, it will be time to begin to work for the larger portion of our programme, which claims for the State the benefit of the future unearned increase in the value of land.

To return to the point from which I started, I repeat that all must at least agree that our present land system stands in need of great reform. What is the real position of those who occupy and who are supposed to own a great portion of the land? The life tenant, in most of those cases, is actually unable by law to make those dispositions of that which we call his property which would be most advantageous to the property, and therefore to the country at large. Where he is not unable by law, he is probably unable in fact to make them. He has the expense of keeping up the family name and the family house, perhaps also a house in London. He has several charges upon the property made before his time, and if he himself is to leave anything to his younger children, he must save it out of the income, which in the opinion of all his neighbours he is bound to spend in keeping up the family place. When we attack him for neglecting his labourers' cottages, we must remember that the benefit of any improvements that he makes will perhaps go to an eldest son (perhaps to a distant cousin), who will also have the property itself; but the expenditure will come out of the pockets of his younger children, and rather than attack him, I think we

should do better to attack the law. Under this system, the land does not produce one-half of what it should. But even in the face of so terrible a fact, I do not hesitate to say that the more serious side is the social one, to which we all of us are witnesses. We are witnesses, whether we have lived in the country ourselves, or whether we have but in passing caught a sight of the wretchedness of the labourers' homes. When I see such a state of things, I am tempted to remember the words of Helvetius, contained in a letter from him to Montesquieu—that he heard much talk of various forms of society, but that he knew only two, viz., the good and the bad—the bad existing on every side, and the good yet to be founded. But I think it clear that the law at least of entail must stand condemned; and until some answer has been made to our demonstrations that a large portion of the soil is occupied by men who are unable to dispossess themselves of it, and who are, on the other hand, unable to improve it, it is idle to accuse us of empty declamation.

We are at present in a vicious circle, out of which there seems no way. Suppose that you succeed in placing to some small extent the labourers upon the land—from the existing land laws flow naturally the existing game laws, but these react again, and your small peasant farmer, when he had got his plot of land, would have got it only to find himself eaten out of it by hares and rabbits.

The whole tone of thought with regard to land, as prompted by the law, is radically vicious in its exalting of the private as contrasted with the public interest. Look at the words of Sir Charles Adderley, in his letter to the *Daily News* about the Birmingham Sewage Bill, in which he speaks of it as “the Bill which Sir Robert Peel and I got thrown out as a nuisance to ourselves.” Now this was a Bill concerning public interests—the interests of the whole town of Birmingham—and one approved by the representatives of the majority of the electors of England. Yet these two country gentlemen are able to speak of its rejection as that of an individual grievance to themselves. I look with more hope to elective county government than to any other single source of remedy. I believe that it is likely to be opposed as fiercely by the magnates here as was the like by the like in Prussia—with the same result. There is no measure which is likely to have more



wide effect. We should do better to resist the change at present, so certain are we to get it soon, unless the County Boards be really elective in the broadest sense. We don't want a fresh creation of new boards of nominees. All other free countries have the county or the township as the unit, and I have seen the district Parliaments, described by writers on Russia and on Denmark, on Sweden and on Norway, as republics under a monarchy, so closely do they represent the institutions of the United States. But monarchists would do well to admit with Bishop Berkeley, "that it might be no ill policy in a kingdom to form itself upon the manners of a republic."

For elective county government to be worth anything in this country, the labourers must have in it their share. A few years ago, when they were docile and easily led, they might have had it for the asking, but it will be more difficult now to give it to them. At that time they were the best of fellows, in the opinion of the country gentlemen and of the county members. In order to live at peace with all the world, it is not only necessary to abstain from meddling in the affairs of anybody else, but to let everybody meddle in your own. But now we are told they are dangerous men. How sudden is the change of base! It reminds me of a story of the fishermen of Grays, in Essex, a fishing village upon the Thames. A whale got stranded there, whereupon the fishermen straightway made a show of it at 6*d.* a head. The Corporation of London, under some old charter, claimed the whale; but the fishermen stuck to their capture till it stank, and then, suddenly turning round upon the Corporation, threatened them with an action for nuisance if the whale were not at once removed!

The labourers are told they are dangerous men! Told so by whom? By dukes and bishops. The Bishop of Gloucester, indeed, who had better have let the matter drop, tries continually, by all means in his power, to escape from the effect of his own words. Vainly, for no bird in a net was ever more enmeshed than he. After all, he had better have quietly admitted that he made a mistake, or, if you will, a blunder. There is, as I once heard it explained, the greatest difference between a blunder and a mistake, and this is the explanation. If I leave my umbrella and take a better, it is

a mistake; but if I take a *worse*, it is a blunder. When, however, the Bishop of Gloucester first denies it, and then pleads his previous good conduct in the shape of interest in the labourers' state, I am reminded of the law stationer, who, when sentenced to penal servitude for forging a name, urged that it was hard to transport him for writing two words, when he had written during his working life millions that were free from all objection. Bishops, I suppose, are not meant by nature for statesmen. Lord Bolingbroke wrote:—"A bishop is a man with a mitre on his head, a crozier in his hand, and lawn sleeves, and sits in a purple elbow-chair to denote that he is a bishop, and to excite the devotion of the multitude." That opinion is, perhaps, as true now as it was when it was written. An American negro, when his master asked him what he thought of the leaders of the opposite political party to that to which he belonged, said:—"Wal, massa, if a war a chicken an dose men war around, a guess a shoul roost high;" and I fear that agricultural labourers may take the same view of some of their new friends.

For the evils which are caused by the gross defects of our land system, and for which we suggest remedies which are economically defensible, there are others who propose remedies which would be mischievous. Two years ago, there was a great talk of emigration, and when some of us expressed grave doubts as to the wisdom of taxing those who stay at home for the aid of those who go, we were accused of leading an interested opposition of capitalists, who were supposed to want cheap labour. I dare say that capitalists want cheap labour, but I certainly am not "a capitalist," nor did I speak in the capitalists' name; but the idea that at once occurred to us, by way of answer, was, that it was, at least, as fair for us to say that the agitation for taxes in aid of emigration was got up by landowners, who were afraid that if they did not ship the people out of England, their political and social privileges might suffer hurt. The Duke of Manchester, Lord George Hamilton, and others of that class, took a leading part in the agitation, and the latter claimed to speak as the workman's friend. But dukes' sons, who are officers in the Guards, and who are returned to the House of Commons as Conservative county members to maintain the establishment of the Irish Church, are not to be universally accepted as the

chosen representatives of the working class ; and I think that the *New York Tribune* was not far wrong when, writing on this subject, it said—"For every ship-load that quits England, there are so many the less claimants to English land."

In discussing this subject, I am prepared to do so without asperity. I believe that in spite of great temptations, the landlord class have been not a bit worse than any other class, and that it is only right that we should show the justice of our demands and their expediency in the abstract, apart from any special necessity caused by the abuse of existing laws. But, although that may be the case with us, it is not the case with all who discuss this subject ; and the demand for change has been based by some upon cases of injustice and tyranny on the part of landowners. What harm is done to the landowners as a class by those of their number who stretch their privileges and abuse their power ! There are, even now, landowners who put clauses into their leases forbidding premises on their estates to be used for Nonconformist worship. There are many who forbid the erection of Nonconformist chapels and Nonconformist schools. We had thought, till lately, that causeless and fanciful evictions were almost confined to Ireland and the Scotch Highlands, but, if we have been rightly informed, some landlords have lately been repeating in England the worst precedents of the worst part of Ireland. Again, the evils of the excessive preservation of game are in the minds of all of us. I repeat, then, that not only is the scheme of Mr. Mill economically defensible, but that when the spokesmen of the workmen of the towns are content to put forth their views in so calm and dispassionate a manner as that in which they were advanced by Mr. Odger in his article in the *Contemporary Review*, it is both idle and dangerous for landowners to refuse to meet their arguments, and to raise the cry of "confiscation."

At the present moment, a small and decreasing number of persons have an interest in the soil. Half of those are prevented by the law from making the use which otherwise they could of the soil they occupy. It is proposed in the *Times*, and by many influential persons, to sell the few public lands that now exist, and to let even those go to swell the estates of the great proprietors. The rights of the public over common lands are day by day being stolen from them,

and no accurate information has, as yet, been collected as to the lands over which such rights exist. The careful labourer, who, by some extraordinary chance, may succeed in saving money, is prevented by the cost of transfer from acquiring any interest in the soil except at an expense disproportionate to that at which land can be obtained by men of wealth. Not only is it proposed to sell the existing public lands, but there is a law still in existence by which men are forbidden to leave, at their deaths, property in land to any public bodies. These are the deplorable incidents of the present law which it is our object to remedy or to correct.

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## FREE TRADE.

*Being a Speech delivered at Chelsea, on 13th of January, 1873.*

LAST year, at our annual meeting, it was my duty to clear my character and my motives from unjust imputation, and in this task I had the aid of the unanimous vote of a densely-thronged assembly of my constituents. This year, no such need arises, and I have only to ask you to consider, in our usual manner, our programme for the immediate future. The most pressing political needs of the community, in my opinion, are—free land, free church, free schools, free trade, free law :—and, as the only means of obtaining them, parliamentary reform. On free schools and free land I have often spoken :—on free church and free law I can point to the far wiser utterances of others. To-night I crave your leave to speak upon Free Trade.

We have lately seen the institution of elaborate comparisons between the Income-Tax and our remaining Customs duties. Some turn their energies against the former, some against the latter ; many who, like myself, are dissatisfied with both, are checked only in their denunciations by the difficulties which stand in the way of amateur financiers, when they suggest new taxes in the place of old.

As for the Income-Tax, speaking of it as an advocate of direct taxation, I protest against being thought to support an impost which involves the injustice of taxing temporary incomes on the same footing with those that are permanent, and the worse injustice of registering suspicion of the honesty of every man who will not allow his books to be inspected by his neighbours who are his rivals in trade. I agree with Mr. Mill, that “direct taxation on income should be reserved as an extraordinary resource for great national emergencies, in which the necessity of a large additional revenue overrules

all objections." The injustice of the tax has been artificially augmented by the harshness of the manner in which it has been collected; and indeed with regard to all taxes at this time, by second applications for taxes already paid, and by a straining of the law upon every point, of which I have in my possession proofs, we have been led to look upon Government as a sort of firm of petty-fogging attorneys.

On the other hand, if we turn to Customs duties, we find much reason to think that they are even more objectionable. The policy of Free Trade has, after making a certain way, been checked in its development; and to those who have examined with care the hindrance to trade produced by even our existing Customs duties, it would seem that we are living in a fool's paradise of content.

Many think that the time has come for united action by all nations in the direction of the international regulation of taxation affecting trade; but if those who object with cause to the Income-Tax are abandoned by free-traders, and left to fight alone, we shall find the efforts of free-traders checked by the action of Income-Tax Reformers, with the effect of leaving matters as they are. Protective duties in this country are now dead, but the question that we have to consider is, whether it is not in the highest degree desirable that even fiscal import duties should be removed, or that where retained, so long as they are retained, they should be made the subject of international regulation. All the arguments that were used at the time of the great struggle against Protection, are as good if used in favour of carrying Free Trade principles to their utmost logical development, with this further argument, that the articles upon which duties are now mainly levied, are consumed by those who, owing to their poverty, buy them in small quantities, when a much larger sum is extracted from their pockets on account of the duty than would otherwise be the case.

It has been said, and said with the most perfect truth, that real freedom of trade "consists not merely in the repeal of protective duties, but in the right to buy, to grow, to manufacture, to import, to export, to use, to exchange, to sell, unrestrained by any fiscal or arbitrary law."

In the eloquent words of "a disciple of Richard Cobden," the writer of the celebrated articles which appeared two years

ago in the *Manchester Examiner*, "a slave has chains on both his hands and both his feet,—you remove them from one hand and one foot, and he has a freer use of his limbs than he had before, but he is as much a slave as formerly—his freedom has as yet no existence." The main principles laid down by Adam Smith, that taxation should be levied from every man in proportion to his means, and so contrived as to take out of the pockets of the people as little as possible beyond what finds its way into the Treasury, are both of them, as it has been said, "grossly violated by a system which raises nearly two-thirds of the revenue by taxes greatly aggravated in the price of commodities, to say nothing of the losses occasioned by it in restricting trade, and so narrowing the field for the profitable employment of capital and labour." Moreover, it may be contended, that the income which is at the most sufficient to provide the mere necessities of life, should, as far as possible, escape taxation, and if this be so, by our present taxes this condition also is greatly violated. The argument that indirect taxation is optional, and can be escaped, is one which tells both ways. In the first place, the statement of fact which it contains is hardly accurate, because the duties upon tea and coffee, and sugar and tobacco, are virtually taxes upon necessities; at all events, some of them are necessities in every case. But, not to dwell upon this point, if taxation is a duty towards the State, and one which should accompany the privileges of citizenship, it is not desirable that it should be optional, but rather that it should be borne without exception by every citizen. To point out the manner in which those duties press upon the smallest incomes, I would refer to the duty upon tobacco, which varies from 8 per cent. upon the choicest and the dearest kinds, to between 400 and 800 per cent., and in some cases 1,800 per cent. upon the cheapest.

But these considerations are not new. So far from that, the present Government may be said to have gained a large portion of its majority by the acceptance of these principles in the country—that is, by their popularity amongst the people. I do not accuse the Government of having broken faith as yet in the nature of their remissions of taxation, although I think them blameable upon the score of economy, at least. But it is well to be beforehand, and in dealing with

this question now, we should be looking less to the past than to the future.

Mr. Bright, a short time before he accepted office, spoke repeatedly in favour of the free breakfast-table, and it is hard to see what answer can be given to the arguments that he then used. But although the Government was helped into office by those speeches, little has been done. Tea has not been touched, and tea is by far the most heavily taxed of the articles which are indicated by the words of Mr. Bright. Tea has become a necessary of life, enormously consumed by all classes, but as much by the poor as by the rich. Looking to the variety of uses to which sugar is applied, it, too, may be called a necessary of life, second in value only to wheat. The tax not only increases its price, but causes imperfect manufacture. These taxes are costly to collect, they hinder *all* trade—not the trade taxed alone—and raise all prices of foreign goods; they grow before they are ultimately paid by the consumer, and at least as much is lost in passing through many hands as comes to the State. The tax-payer does not know what he pays, which is provocative of waste. The food taxes press far more heavily upon the poor than on the rich; and the compensation given by the exemption of the poor from Income-Tax is rough and unequal, and raises up a host of mistaken beliefs. They cause fraud and adulteration, and the tobacco duties still produce an enormous amount of smuggling; the whole of these duties, therefore, injure public morals and public health: and, lastly, the abolition of them is the only way to bring about absolute freedom of interchange, and, therefore, the most available of all methods for spreading civilization and checking war. The peace of the world depends on free trade, because the guarantees for peace are strengthened as that freedom becomes more and more complete, and will be at their strongest when it is absolute.

We have not free trade as yet. You cannot have free trade in anything so long as you have not free trade in all. Trade is hindered in every direction by Customs regulations. Absolute freedom of trade would lead to many advancements in civilization tending to form Europe into a single state; for instance, to an international penny post with a common postage stamp, to an international money. But, at least let us hope that we shall live to see this country one great free



port. There is, however, special reason for moving at the present time. Looking to the position of the free trade movement in France and in America, a marked declaration on the part of England would have at this moment immense international value.

Our opponents resort to figures by the score to prove that consumption and trade are not much hindered by Customs duties. Figures are not always worth very much. I remember once a vast increase in the imports into England from the colonies. I found it all, on going into detail, to be under two heads—the Bermudas, risen from 100,000*l.* a year to three millions, and Turk's Island from nothing to a million and a half. Future statisticians may fail to discover that American blockade-running was the cause.

What is the argument used against the abolition of the duties on food and trade? That it is necessary to retain a sufficient number of sources of revenue in time of peace to admit of sudden expansion in time of war; that it is politically dangerous to relieve poor electors from taxation, and leave it to be chiefly borne by a rich minority. As for the first of these objections, I do not believe in this custom of keeping up in time of peace a taxation ready for war. Gather your taxes on the principles that will tend the least to limit trade, grow rich, husband your resources, and then if war comes, you will be better able to bear it. Rather than help the next generation, too, to fight, I would prefer to so leave taxation as to make it hard for them to do so. As for the second objection, the fear is that we shall become spendthrift, because the poor, it is said, not paying taxes, if the sugar and tea duties were removed, would wish for public money to be spent in all directions that they might get the benefit. Now, in the case of the removal of these duties only, the vast majority of the voters would still pay taxes, in the tax on tobacco and on beer and spirits. A great many teetotallers smoke, and the vast majority, I repeat, of the voters would still pay. Besides, I take it that the workmen are shrewd enough to know that you limit the employment of labour if you tax heavily the business income of the employer, and that in this way, lavish expenditure still harms even the teetotaller who does not smoke. We may safely defy the ingenious Mr. Lowe himself to devise a system of taxation in which the tax will not ultimately fall

upon all the inhabitants of the country. The best system is only the one in which this end is accomplished with the least possible waste. It seems to me that this political danger argument has been pushed too far. We must take a broader view—liberate trade, simplify burdens as well as lighten them, and study less the duties of this or that class than the happiness of the country as a whole. Moreover, at present the inequality is the other way. According to the Financial Reform Association, the workmen pay nearly twice as much per cent. on their incomes as do the rich; according to Mr. Dudley Baxter, they pay a little *less*, namely, as 7 per cent. is to  $9\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. But then they pay almost entirely upon necessities, and 7 per cent. on the necessities of life is a very different thing from  $9\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. on superfluities. I hope that now that the over-taxed people of small incomes have more power in the State than has heretofore been the case, they will not remain dumb upon this question. It is Bentham, I think, who shows that “equality of taxation” ought to mean equality of sacrifice. A certain minimum of income sufficient to provide the necessities of life to a moderately numerous family, should not be heavily taxed, but only the surplus beyond this. Suppose this minimum to be 50*l.* a year for each family, supposing the workmen to be five million families (which is not much above the mark), this would give 250 millions for necessities. But their whole income is computed at 325 millions by Mr. Dudley Baxter, leaving only 75 millions of superfluities, which, on this principle, would be taxed; on this, 30 millions of taxes are raised. The rich are two millions of families, which gives 100 millions for necessities, but they have 500 millions, leaving 400 millions to be taxed, which bears little more than 50 millions of taxes. I repeat, that the small incomes are over-taxed; almost as much over-taxed as when Hone wrote—

“These are the people all tattered and torn,  
Who curse the day wherein they were born,  
On account of taxation too great to be borne;  
Who in vain petition in every form,  
And pray for relief from night to morn.”

Almost as much over-taxed, but far more powerful now to right themselves.

There is one reason, not hard to find, why we move no faster. The great revenue departments are opposed to movement. Indirect taxes take a great deal of collection. That is our objection to them. The departments don't mind our nibbling at the bread, or pecking at the plums and currants, but touch tea, and they foresee a reduction of staff. Still, even this obstruction must come to an end, and it is your fault if it does not end soon.

Having thus begun by condemning large branches of the existing revenue as raised by oppressive means, we have to consider how it would be possible to do without them. Two sets of questions at once are involved—the first, that of how much could be saved from our expenditure; the second, that of what other and less hurtful taxes could be imposed. I will treat the latter question first. I say that both with regard to the Income-Tax as at present raised, and some at least of the Customs duties, upon what are virtually necessities of life, I agree with Bentham's answer to those who said to him that he who reprobates a tax ought to have a better in his hand. His answer was, "A juster condition never was imposed; I fulfil it at the first word; my better tax is—any other that can be named." We have lately seen a proposition for increased taxation upon land. Now, in principle, there is nothing that can be offered in opposition to that proposal. There are few of us who would regret to see the State discourage the accumulation of land in a few hands. I say that there is nothing more scandalous than the partial exemption of landed property from the equal incidence of taxes levied on successions from the dead. The so-called "land-tax" is no tax at all, but a far too mild form of the ancient rent or service paid to the Crown, and now made ridiculous by its being paid upon an assessment, not increasing with the value, but fixed at a stationary amount. I will not, however, go into the history of the juggling job by which the land was freed from taxes, but will only point out that the vast increase in the value of land arising from the opening of mines, the growth of towns, and the prosperity of the country, has altogether escaped taxation. Had the land been properly taxed, we should never have had that frightful accumulation of war-debt which makes the food and trade taxes partly necessary, and the fixing of the land-tax on the

value as it stood at the time of William III. was as though the Income-Tax to be paid by any self-made man should stand, when he has made his 10,000*l.* a year, as it did when he was a clerk at 100*l.*

Mr. Cobden it was who first pointed out the fact, that while land constantly increases in value, we have "no corresponding contributions from that increase in aiding to defray our public expenditure." Again, he said, "The land-owner need not expend a shilling on improvements. He may neglect his property, he may be an absentee, still its value goes on increasing with the increase of population." On another occasion Cobden said, "Real property is the only property which not only does not diminish in value, but, in a country growing in population and advancing in prosperity, always increases in value, and that without any help from the owner." All this is true, and it points to the wisdom of a gradual increase of the taxation upon land. But I do not think that it would be fair suddenly to throw any large increase of taxation upon land. To what other source, then, of national income can we turn? I venture to suggest that the truth of Bentham's statement has never been shaken, that the best of all financial resources is that "which gives to the public a share in property become vacant by death, and failure of near relations. The formation of counter-expectations being prevented by pre-established law, receipts from this source need not be attended with that vexatious sense of privation which is the inseparable accompaniment of every other tax."

We are already led to look at this resource by the temptation of a special exemption now existing in favour of certain kinds of property. While personalty is subject to legacy and probate duty, and has to pay the full amount at once, real property is exempt from those, and only pays succession duty on its value estimated as a life annuity, and this, too, by easy instalments.

Now, I admit that under the present strict law of entail and settlement, it would be unjust to call upon the nominal owner of the land, who is but, in fact, a lodger on the property that he calls his own, for a greater sacrifice than he has to make at present. But such a demand could well be made, and made with fairness, in connexion with the proposed aboli-

tion of the law, and substitution of a more rational state of things, and in connexion, too, with that cheapened transfer which will be a great boon to the landowner.

It is clear, however, that an increase of legacy and succession duty in the case of successions by strangers, or by distant relatives, is the least onerous, and is likely to be the most productive of all new taxes. It would in such cases, as a general rule, defeat no legitimate expectation, and when once the law was made, no man would feel himself robbed by its operation. It is already law up to a certain point, and no one ever complains of it as a grievance. If it is possible to conceive such a thing as a popular tax, an increased tax on distant successions would be popular. It would not be unpopular after a time even with those to whom the legacies were left. There would be no expectation, and, therefore, no disappointment. They would know that the testator, being cognizant of the law, they would have received from him the amount which he really intended for them. Much would depend upon the manner of the collection, and it is clear that it should be immediate; that the property should not be allowed to pass into the hands of legatees, who would afterwards be made to surrender a large portion. This for instant wants; but I believe firmly in the wisdom of gradually raising the taxation upon land until ultimately it bears here that large proportion of the burdens of the country which in former times it did bear here, and which it still bears in many foreign countries. Having said this, I turn to the other side of the question, and to the consideration of measures of economy.

We spend each year some seventy millions sterling! Did we spend but sixty, we should be rid of the tea, coffee, and sugar duties, or from the same saving the Income-Tax could be spared. Seventy millions! What do we do with it? Into what gulf do we drop these terrible sums? Much we spend on those

“ . . . who lord it o’er their fellow-men  
With most prevailing tinsel: who unpen  
Their baaing vanities, to browse away  
The comfortable green and juicy hay  
From human pastures!”

Much on the sinecurists! But cannot we save upon the



effective branches of the public service—upon the army, the navy, the colonies, and the cost of collection of the revenue itself? We are following neither the one course nor the other. We maintain an army which is unnecessarily costly for defence, and which is useless for the purpose of continental war. If we are not prepared to be a military power, why not provide for India by a separate army, and for home defence by national enrolment and home drill, backed by permanent scientific and mounted corps, and rely for foreign war, if ever such need should unfortunately again arise, on volunteers from the home foot?

As for the navy—some saving has been effected by the reduction of foreign squadrons, but we still waste prodigious sums upon our Mediterranean fleet. Its last performance merits notice when we are discussing the need for its retention. The British fleet of ironclads has been escorting the Italian King of Spain upon an electioneering tour. Admiral Yelverton assured the King that the British fleet was at his service, and the King took the Admiral at his word. What were these elections, and who is this King, to help whom the whole weight of British prestige was thrown? They were elections in which the party in power, two months before, with a majority of two to one, carried in all but thirteen seats, while the republican party carried twelve of the largest towns without a contest, and against the whole weight of illegal influence returned eighty of their men. I say "illegal influence." Illegal influence upon elections, by the party in power, not wholly unknown in England, and so common in Spain that it is said there that a cabinet council is generally held beforehand, at which the ministry decide how many of the opposition it will be advisable to return. The King to whom our fleet was offered is a stranger King—amiable and clever, but disliked in the south as a king by the Republicans, and detested in the north as a stranger by the Monarchists, and likely before long to return to a happier life in his own land. This is a specimen of the manner in which is exercised the political influence of our fleet in the Mediterranean Sea. Why, then, the present expenditure on our navy? The next strongest in fine ships is the navy of our ally—the Turkish. The Americans and French are going backwards with their fleets. The Prussian is still small; the

Russian, owing to the configuration of the coasts, formidable only upon paper. Why, then, such expenditure upon the navy; why, at all events, a Mediterranean fleet, now that political power has passed from Mediterranean shores?

The colonies again—our prides, indeed, but costly prides, which involve the tea duties and many more! Why should a country like the Canadian Dominion, with plenty of virgin soil,—with four millions of people,—with four millions and a half of revenue,—with a trifling debt, offering us no advantages in trade, and levying heavy duties upon our goods,—why should such a country take from us a large sum in direct taxation, and pay besides none of the general costs of the government of the empire? Why should Australia do the like, and only India, a far poorer country, bear her own costs of every kind, merely because she has no Parliament, and is dumb and weak?

The official returns show that our colonists consume from twice to three times as much sugar and meat as our people, man for man, woman for woman, child for child, yet we (and India) still pay the whole cost of the general management of the empire, of its commercial and political diplomacy, and all but the whole of its expenditure for war.

A month or two ago, Mr. Knatchbull-Hugessen delivered a lecture to his constituents at Deal, in which he proclaimed those principles in respect to our colonial affairs which used to be considered heretical by the Liberal party, but which now are popular. I may say, however, that when the present Government had to deal with the colonies, it dealt with them through Lord Granville and Mr. Cardwell, who held the older and less fashionable view. But now that it has to talk to them, it speaks through the lips of Mr. Hugessen, who holds the less rigid view, so that the Government gets the credit of both policies. Mr. Hugessen spoke very largely of the advantage to this country of the colonial connexion, and he set up an antagonist who does not exist in order to knock down his imaginary foe, when he demolished in a triumphant passage the statesmen who wished to drive the colonies into independence. I say an imaginary foe, because those of us who have taken the older and less fashionable view have never proposed anything of the kind, but only that the colonists, if they desire to maintain the connexion, should

bear some portion of its burdens. Mr. Hugessen forgot that it was the ceaseless storm of argument directed against the very position which he now occupies, by those whom he attempts to ridicule, which has caused within the last four years alone a saving, accompanied by a positive increase, not a decrease, of strength to the empire, of a million and a quarter or of a million and a half a year. I said just now that the colonists do not bear their fair share of the burdens of the empire. They bear no such share as is borne by India. Why not? They come to us for aid of a kind which is most objectionable—the aid of guarantees. Canada is to have one this year. The military expenditure has decreased, but it is still enormous, and I may say unknown. The charges which are returned to us exclude charges for barracks, hospitals, and stores, for arms and accoutrements, and for all those tremendous sources of expenditure, recruiting, administration, head-quarter expenses, staff and other non-effective charges. Now a share of those is paid by India, but no share whatever is paid by the other colonies and dependencies of England.

In the colonies and dependencies proper, taking no account of Gibraltar, Malta, St. Helena, and China, and even omitting Bermuda, which is retained for imperial purposes, we keep up still between eleven and twelve thousand men. We spend in direct military charges, outside of Great Britain and India, one and a half million more than they repay,—two hundred thousand a year on the West India Islands and Honduras,—two hundred thousand a year on the African stations and the Mauritius. Much of the money might far better be thrown into the sea at once. For instance, the cost of 200 men at St. Helena, for whom we pay 25,000*l.* a year in direct expenditure alone. The total direct cost of our colonies and dependencies, excluding India, is still three and a half millions a year,\* almost the whole of which, with the exception of the

\* The astounding ignorance displayed by a leader-writer of the *Standard* newspaper in an article on this passage of Sir Charles Dilke's speech, which appeared on January 14th, merits exposure. The *Standard* was made to say :—"Three millions and a half. Does Sir Charles Dilke believe that this or anything like this sum is paid by the British taxpayer for the luxury of possessing colonies? If he does, he must hereafter be reckoned as a most worthless authority on all colonial subjects." The fact is, that three and a half millions, as the expenditure on the colonies, is a figure taken directly from the official return, and that the

cost of Malta, might easily be saved. The Falkland Islands have been in the possession at one time or another of almost all the powers under the sun, and have been abandoned by each in turn. We spend there about 6,000*l.* more than we raise, and it is absolutely impossible to give any adequate reason for that expenditure, the place being wholly useless. When I mentioned the cost of the troops in St. Helena, I forgot the civil charges, which amount to about 14,000*l.* a year more. If it is necessary to incur this expenditure upon rocky barren islands in the Atlantic, it must needs be just as necessary to occupy all the rocky stations on the coast of the Red Sea, for a stronger case might be made for the retention of any one of them than for that of St. Helena or the Falkland Islands. In saying all these things, I only state that which has been the opinion of men who made colonial policy more their study than any who now take part in Colonial Government. Even the *Quarterly Review* not many years ago said, that "there must be some reciprocity in our colonial relations, and the colonists, if they wish to retain the privileges, must bear their share of the burdens of British citizenship." Lord Grey, who had more experience of the subject than any other man, said, that "the expenditure on the colonies ought to be very largely reduced. They are relieved from all that is onerous to them in connexion with the mother country, and they should be required to contribute much more than they have hitherto done to their own protection." But I go further, and say, in the words of Adam Smith, "If any of the provinces of the British empire cannot be made to contribute towards the support of the whole empire, it is surely time that Britain should free herself from the expense of defending those provinces in time of war, and of supporting any part of their civil and military establishments in time of peace." I contend that the colonies should not only provide for their own defence, but that if they set store upon the privilege of citizenship of the empire, that they should bear, as India bears, a portion of our expenditure upon the navy, which protects their trade, and upon the diplomatic and consular service which throughout the world is supposed to aid its interests.

writer in the *Standard* has fallen head over heels into the pitfall of a belief that "colonial *military* expenditure" and "colonial expenditure" are one and the same thing.

I mention the naval force because I believe that from one-third to one-half of our active navy is maintained for the benefit of the colonies, and you must remember that all the charges appear in the general naval estimates, and are not set down in that account which I named of three and a half millions against the colonies. I have said before, and I think that it could be proved, that the tea and sugar duties do not produce us more than our colonies and dependencies cost.

Hitherto I have spoken chiefly of the duty of the greater colonies to bear a share of the expenses of the empire at large, but I had to except some stations, of which Gibraltar is a type, and from which it is hopeless to expect a contribution. It is treading, I know, upon dangerous ground, but is it as necessary as we believe that these great military stations should, at all hazards, be maintained as such? The Duke of Cambridge, in his evidence before the Committee on the army in India and in the colonies, made a very singular admission. He said, "If I were certain that I could mass troops at home and retain them, there might be some advantage, no doubt, in having them massed; but I feel such a doubt upon the subject, I confess I think it is much better as it is, and that I have more security of keeping the army up to an efficient state by having them scattered. Therefore, I contend that it is better that they should be scattered as they are now than that we should have too large bodies in central positions, because the arrangement could not be long maintained." Suppose that the Duke were right, and that the troops brought home from Gibraltar—if that spot, for instance, were neutralized by international agreement—were disbanded instead of being kept up there, I believe that the saving to this country might be estimated pretty fairly at one million a year. Now, the question is, whether, considering its position, it is worth the million that we are paying for it every year. There is no trade at Gibraltar, except the smuggling trade, which so justly incenses every Spaniard. The rock does not command the entrance to the Mediterranean. We command it only if we command the seas, and if we command the seas, we command the entrance to the Mediterranean independently of Gibraltar. The only argument as to its value, which is often used, is that it is wanted as a coaling station. As a coaling station in time of peace it would



continue to flourish, whether we spent a million on it each year, or whether we did not; and as to a coaling station in time of war, it would be, as I said just now, useless if we had not the command of the seas, and useless also if we had it. In a Mediterranean war, Spain would not be likely to be neutral. If Spain were friendly, Gibraltar would not be needed; and if Spain were hostile, the long range guns which she possesses would, as I saw for myself in 1869, render Gibraltar useless to us as a coaling station in time of war.

It must be remembered, too, that Spain is more likely to be friendly if there are no English troops at Gibraltar than if our flag continues to fly over the possession. The Spanish, although a distracted nation, has never ceased to be a warlike one; and if there be any question which could unite Carlists, Alphonsists, Constitutional Monarchists, and Republicans, it would be the hope of regaining Gibraltar by the help of other powers.

I have not said one word, it will be seen, of the more serious moral aspect of the question, because it did not come within the scope of my present subject so to do. The holding of Gibraltar by the English is, however, to the Spaniards, as great an insult as would be to England the holding of the Isle of Wight by Spain. The original capture of Gibraltar was a theft, and its restoration was often promised. We have never had undisputed possession of the place. The Spaniards have begged for it often, and fought for it whenever they have had the power. Our possession of it is an insult, and something more, for the rock is a nest of plotters, and a smuggling post of the first magnitude.

It is often said that Spain would be too weak to hold the rock, and that it would go to France, or to some other power, just as it is said that we must not cease to spend our half million a year, or whatever it is, on Bermuda, for fear the Americans should seize it. That need be no obstacle to its surrender, even if it be true. The rock could easily be neutralized by a general agreement, and its neutralization would point to a similar means of gradually reducing our naval expenditure, by obtaining the co-operation of other countries in the exercise of that maritime police for which over half the waters of the globe we at present make ourselves alone responsible.

For my part, I should be willing to give the rock to Spain, and to trust to Spanish pride and Spanish bravery for its retention ; to trust, too, to the feeling of international responsibility, which is strong enough now, I think, to prevent nations from stealing other people's property, though not strong enough, it would appear, to make them restore property already stolen.

Gibraltar is, I maintain, useless to us, and a drain upon the resources of the country. But speaking for myself only, and not for others, I would sooner see England give it up, if it were ten times as valuable, as the strongest advocate for its retention would contend, on account of the moral grandeur of the example which we should set.

It is not as an advocate of "peace at any price" that I say this. The foolish annexation of French territory, inhabited by a hostile population, forces Germany to maintain her armaments, and so long as Germany is armed to the teeth, a truly pacific foreign policy—that is, one which involves disarmament—cannot with honour to the country be pursued. In annexing Alsace and half Lorraine, on the ground of natural frontier and common race, Germany forgot that ideas, unlike language, have no frontier, and are of no race. How great a share has this violation by Germany of sound principle in the present political miseries of France. After the fall of the Empire, we hoped that, freed from its corruption, France would be freed, too, of her factions. But just as in the Canadian forests, after a great fire, when the ground is cleared and all seems open for a fresh start of wholesome vegetation, no sooner does the light of heaven pierce the smoke and reach the soil, than new weeds, hitherto unknown, spring up and cumber the earth on every side, so it is in France. France, however, will not be always disunited—not always fallen ; and no European system founded in the belief that France has been degraded to the rank of a second-rate power can be permanent.

The examples of possible economies that I have given are examples only, and not the chief. Every branch of the public expenditure forms a similar field. On all sides there is routine and waste. Take, for instance, an amusing case of the administration of a military department in this parish, which came before me last year. The services of several distinguished

and highly-paid officials—including, I believe, a Lord of the Treasury and the Comptroller-General—were required at a meeting held at Chelsea Hospital to decide whether one of the pensioners who was to be chapel clerk—there being no difference of opinion as to who he should be—was to be appointed by the Governor or the Chaplain, or the Governor on the recommendation of the Chaplain, or the Secretary after consulting with the Chaplain.

We are told by many that although we shall soon have a great reduction upon certain estimates where waste takes place, we shall have, nevertheless, to look for a corresponding increase upon others, and notably upon education. I wish to see a large expenditure upon education; but there are vast endowments and enormous properties under the direction of the Church, which were left by pious persons in the Middle Ages for no other purpose than that of education, given to the Church, not as the Church in its present light, but as being then the representative of the nation for purposes of charity and of the education of the people. Is it not possible that some cure for increasing estimates may be found in that direction? Archbishop Manning cannot, I suppose, be looked upon as a revolutionist, but I noticed the other day, in a lecture which he gave at Tower Hill, that he used these words, "The patrimony of the Church is the patrimony of the poor, and not intended for the enrichment of bishops and priests."

There is happily a growing impatience of taxation—I say happily, because I think that there can be nothing more deplorable than the tacit agreement of the people in a system which upon all hands cramps the development of the country. It was thought last year enough to tell me, when I named sinecures still existing, that no fresh ones had been created during the present reign, although it was not denied that fresh appointments had been made to old ones. I doubt whether such answers as this will long be deemed sufficient. It will be necessary soon for Government to go to the root of the evil and try a real economy, instead of attempting flint-skinning in the shape of under-payment of their writers, under-payment of their postmen, and under-payment of their police.

I repeat, then, that our programme should be definite, and

I repeat the words in which I suggested that that programme should be couched. When a writer in a local paper says that I want that the workmen should monopolize power, I answer you have classes; you have more—you have political as well as social castes. By free land and free trade, by free law, and free church, and free schools, we might hope that we should break them down, and have a united people in the future.

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## REFORM CONFERENCE.

*St. James's Hall, 12th of November, 1872.*

HAVING been asked to state the reasons for the assembling of this Conference on Parliamentary Reform, I find it impossible to answer without going into a brief history of the attempts which have been hitherto made to reach firm ground. We have met chiefly with a view to advocate the introduction for the first time of principle into the settlement both of the franchise and of the distribution of political power. There is a certain measure of principle introduced already into the borough franchise. Our desire, then, is to extend principle to the county franchise, and to decide that for the future, whatever the franchise may be, it should, at least, be the same in the counties and the towns. We wish also to propose the first introduction of principle into the distribution of seats for Parliament. We undertake this movement not without a special reason, but because while the Radical party in England are always, and very properly, asked what they want, they cannot but see that there is no chance of their obtaining any of their demands, not even those to which they think that a majority of the people are favourable, without a new parliamentary reform. It was, therefore, decided to place before the Conference, as the first basis of its meeting, two resolutions; the one declaring that there should be an equality of franchise throughout the country, and the other declaring that there should be an approximate equality of political power. These were the principles which the Committee believe are ripe for immediate action, and they are approved by the delegates present at the Conference held this day. The other decisions of the Conference represent the opinions of those attending it,—opinions which may be



modified by circumstances, and which are not equally binding on the bodies represented.

We have often been reproached that we do not sufficiently concentrate our energies upon any one subject at a time, and that we weaken ourselves by over-diffusion of our energy. Now, a reform which upon careful inquiry appears to be, as this does, a necessary basis to all others, is undoubtedly that one which, while upon the one side it is the more urgent, on the other is the most useful, on which we can concentrate our power. Our request is surely moderate enough, for it consists only in a demand that the nation should be truly and fairly represented, and that those future errors which may be made by Parliament,—for Parliament will be ever fallible,—should be errors for which at least the whole people are responsible. It was with the greatest wisdom that in 1859, Mr. Bright, speaking at Bradford, said :—“ Watch this point with the keenest eye possible—repudiate without mercy any Bill of any Government, whatever its franchise, whatever its seeming concessions may be, if it does not distribute seats, obtained from the extinction of small boroughs, among the great city populations of the kingdom.” Speaking at Rochdale in 1860, again he said :—“ To give a man a vote may be to please his sentiment of independence and equality, and he may like to go up and poll with his richer neighbour ; yet as regards the legislation and composition of Parliament and action upon Government, the giving a man a vote, or a million of men votes, may be made of no effect—of no value whatsoever, unless that which I call the soul of your representative system be equitably adjusted.” Since that time, Mr. Bright has been a member of the Government, and yet the matter remains very much as it stood before. There are others here who will speak with authority as to the state of things which exists in the North of England. I will speak chiefly of that which exists in the neighbourhood of this spot. Take Marylebone for an instance. What reason can there be why an elector of Marylebone should have only the one two-hundred-and-twentieth part as much electoral power as an elector of Portarlington? Now that is one of the strongest cases that we can put. But taking them hap-hazard, just as they come, the following places stand consecutively on the list of English and Scotch boroughs—leaving

out the Irish, which are worse still, but which may be viewed as standing by themselves—Eye, Falkirk, Finsbury, Flint, and Frome. Now Eye, Falkirk, Flint, and Frome have, together, about 6,000 voters, but they return twice as many members as Finsbury with its 36,000 electors. A little further on in the list we have the following towns coming together:—Liverpool, London, Ludlow, and Lymington. Ludlow and Lymington have, together, 1,400 voters; Liverpool has 50,000, and London 20,000—that is, 70,000 between those two latter, or an average of 10,000 voters to one member; while in Ludlow and Lymington there are 700 voters to a member. Taking London all through the city and metropolitan districts together, there are about 300,000 voters, that is without counting the people who live in Croydon, and Battersea, and the extreme north-east of London, who go unheard. While those 300,000 voters, representing between three and four millions of people, have but twenty-two members amongst them, the whole of the Irish boroughs have but 50,000 voters, but they have thirty-seven members, although they have only one-sixth as many voters as there are in London, which returns only twenty-two. Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, and Glasgow have each of them more voters than there are in the whole of the Irish boroughs put together, and each of them has but three members instead of thirty-seven. There are 100 members of the House who sit for about 1,080,000 voters. There are another 100 members who sit for about the odd 80,000 voters! Now, not only are those disproportions ridiculous, but they are also unfair. They are unfair to the inhabitants of the large towns when their interests come into conflict with those of the inhabitants of the small towns. Any number of cases of this kind may be shown. I have shown them over and over again myself; but I may briefly state that in the present year there has been a notable instance of what I say, viz., the defeat of a measure concerning a large town—the Birmingham Sewage Bill, which was lost on a division by a majority composed of representatives of the small boroughs—by members representing vastly fewer voters than those that composed the minority. Indeed, the difference between the supporters of the motion of Sir Charles Adderley on that occasion, and the supporters of the just rights of the people of Birmingham, was no less than half a million of

voters against Sir Charles Adderley, although he was victorious on the division.

The result of the continuance of the existing state of things is to give us a practical unfairness in dealing with many questions not inferior to that which existed before the passing of the great Reform Bill. There are no boroughs now with a dozen or even with a single hundred of electors ; but looking to the enormous growth of wealth and population in the northern portion of the country, the practical disparities and differences in the weight of votes may safely be said to be as great at the present time as they were before 1832. If there has been something gained in figures, there has, perhaps, on the other hand, been something lost in fact ; for many of the nominees sitting for pure nomination boroughs took, from the very nature of the tenure of their seats, a more independent view of political affairs than is taken by some among the more fairly elected members of the present House. Influence, too, is hardly less rife at the present time than it was before the great Reform Act. Whole pages of any parliamentary guide are filled with lists of boroughs, and even of counties, too, in which the politics of the people are shown to be of no account beside the opinions of the chief proprietor. There are boroughs which, as a matter of course, have returned members of the same family from the days of Charles II. to the present time. There are still more boroughs and counties, the representation of which is divided between the two or three chief families of their neighbourhood ; and, in defiance of the principle that it is the highest possible breach of the privileges of the Commons for Peers to interfere in the election of its members, it is notorious that at least a hundred members of the House of Commons are the nominees of Peers of Parliament. Why do not our statesmen help us ? What says Bacon, in his " Essay on Innovations " ?—" If time alters things to the worse, and wisdom and counsel shall not alter them to the better, what shall be the end ?"

The Conservatives often by their leaders say, " It is true that the large boroughs are under-represented as contrasted with the small boroughs, but then the counties are ill treated as compared with both." Now, how far is this the fact ? Taking population as the basis of our estimate, there is undoubtedly almost double the population to a member in the

counties that there is population to a member in the boroughs. But what boroughs? Why the vast majority of them are those village boroughs, the separate existence of which we continually deplore. The county people choose to call them towns. I think we should be as justified when speaking of them if we consider them as purely agricultural places, and I hope that ultimately the discussions may lead to this result, that towns-people and county-people alike may concur in their disfranchisement. But I will go further, and ask upon what ground population is to be taken as the test. Population might be a convenient or an inconvenient test when the franchise comes to be equal in the counties and in the towns; but so long as it is different, I would ask what right have you to take population as your test, and to count on behalf of Mr. Newdegate in Warwickshire the unrepresented followers of Mr. Joseph Arch? The only test which, with a different franchise, we can allow, is that of the number of electors. The text upon which we should never cease to preach is that of the equality of every elector with every other. Middlesex, Lancashire, Yorkshire, and East Kent are under-represented even on this test, and the representatives of these counties attend our Conference and unite with us in action. The North Riding and the East Riding have between them eight members to 80,000 electors, that is, one member to every 10,000 voters, while the county of Sutherland has one member for 343 electors.

Hitherto I have spoken only of the most flagrant and striking of our electoral anomalies, viz., the difference in the weight of votes between one part of the country and another; but the system is full of anomalies from end to end. I referred to the position of the franchise as being comparatively speaking satisfactory; but even here, when after some years we shall have got a single franchise for all portions of the country, from which we still are a long way off, even then how anomalous will be the position of affairs! You will have a 10 $\frac{1}{2}$  franchise and an occupation franchise co-existing side by side, and a lodger franchise which is intended to confer great benefits upon a class very numerous in London, but which has found the difficulties in the way so great as to be insuperable—difficulties which we in the House of Commons find it impossible to prevail upon the House to remove.



You still will disfranchise a man for moving from one side of a street to the other, and you still will disfranchise him for moving from one qualifying set of rooms to another better set in the same house, upon the same floor. Even were you to correct these anomalies, it is questionable whether your ratepaying franchise is advisable in itself. It rests upon the principle contained in the old maxim that taxation without representation is tyranny. Now, in this country, every one contributes to the revenue through indirect taxation. To connect the franchise with the holding of property, as long as property is so unequally distributed as it is, is to give to the few increased power to rule the many. If taxation were the sole business of Parliament, and if only property were taxed, the principle would be a logical one. But inasmuch as all contribute to the taxes, all would seem to be entitled to some share in the representation, whereas many are left unheard, while the over-represented property-holders have strong tendencies to tax anything rather than their own accumulated wealth. But Parliament does more than levy taxes. It legislates for all classes, often passing measures specially affecting, and even solely affecting, the poorest, that is, the unrepresented class.

For these reasons we have felt it necessary to unite the question of the county franchise with that of the redistribution of seats in our programme. Not for these reasons only! The settlement of the redistribution question is impossible in itself, unless it be undertaken at the same time with the reduction of the county franchise. But, also, the labourers' agitation, as Mr. Arch will tell us, has convinced those of the labourers who have hitherto taken no interest in politics at all, that they will never be fairly treated as other men are treated by those with whom they have to deal, until the franchise is extended to their class. There is no danger that they will not get such of their rights as law can give them when once they are entitled to vote for county members. If there be a danger in their enfranchisement, it lies upon the other side—in the possibility of competitors for their favour flattering them too much.

We go further, however, than this in the principle of our demands. Mr. Lowe once said in the House of Commons, during the progress of his fierce opposition to that Reform Bill to which he owes his present place, that "the fran-



chise, like every other political expedient, is a means to an end—the end being the preservation of order in the country, and the preventing of any tyranny of one class over another.” We partly agree and partly disagree with those words. They are words that show that his ability to secure election for a University gives a man that independence which the advocates of fancy franchises desire—an independence which I should not value, because it is an independence of the opinion of one’s countrymen. We believe, on the contrary, that the Commons House of Parliament—between the majority in which and the majority of the people there should be perfect harmony—should be elected on the widest franchise. Since Sir Francis Burdett moved Jeremy Bentham’s resolution on Reform in 1818, the opinion has been growing that Bentham and his followers were right in their belief, that it is difficult for a country to go far wrong when the opinion of every citizen has equal weight, and the opinion of the greatest number in every case prevails. We believe in so swelling the number of electors, that the riches of individuals cannot bribe them, nor the knaveries of individuals manage them. We are met by the statement that in the existing House of Commons we have got an efficient legislative machine. We answer that we do not believe, even voting upon this narrow ground, chosen by our enemies, that the existing House of Commons is so good that there is nothing to be done but to leave it alone.

Not only is the distribution of political power capricious in the extreme—not only is there a different franchise in different parts of the country without any principle as a base, but there are other and even more vexatious restrictions, by which, also upon no principle, political power is limited to a class. A volume might any year be written on the monstrous decisions of revising courts—monstrous, that is, in the sense of being based upon no principle, and having the effect of defeating the intended operation of the laws, but often inevitable as far as the revising barristers are concerned, and the inevitable result of the complications of our property franchise.

I have put together a few of those which have struck me in the present year—all of them having occurred in London. If you take the country round, I have no doubt that an equal proportion, and a far greater number, therefore, could be found.

Here is one from Kensington. Mr. Young claimed as a householder, whose name had been omitted from the register. His landlord pays the rates by agreement. Before the proper day for entering his claim, he asked his landlord if the rates were paid. His landlord said they were. Mr. Young knew that by law, if the rates were not paid by the landlord, the overseers were bound, before a certain date, to send notice to the occupier. He got no such notice, and he naturally believed that his landlord had been right. But the rates had never been paid. The overseers admitted in court that they had failed to notify this fact, and Mr. Young was, consequently, disfranchised.

The next case I take from Westminster. Mr. Cunningham claimed to vote as a lodger, on account of having occupied some rooms, for which he paid 14s. a week, since 1870. His vote was allowed, but he returned into court and said that when he had been asked whether he had occupied the same lodgings during the whole time, he had forgotten to mention that during the greater portion of the time he had paid 12s. a week for the same lodgings without a kitchen, but that during the last ten weeks he had had the kitchen, and paid 14s. a week. He was, consequently, struck off the register, although the amount under the Act is less than 5s. a week. He was, therefore, in fact, struck off the register only because he had added a kitchen to his rooms.

The next case I take from Middlesex. Mr. Ashton, who was on the list of voters for a piece of land as a freeholder, was objected to by the Conservatives, on the ground that he occupied the land as part of his house. He, however, proved that there were two deeds, and consequently a severance of title; but it ultimately came out that there was a dust-bin upon the land in question, whereupon this dust-bin deprived him of his vote.

Other anomalies, which can hardly be long maintained, are—the length of the Parliaments, the throwing upon candidates the necessary costs of holding an election, and, I am even prepared to say, the non-payment of members for their service. With regard to the length of Parliaments, they, in the earliest times, were annual, afterwards biennial, irregular under the Stuarts, and triennial under the Revolution. But in days when the popular control exercised by the people over

Parliament was less even than it is at present, a Parliament that had been chosen for three years gave itself four more years' lease of life, and brought septennial Parliaments upon the nation, with the effect of greatly weakening, as I believe, the accuracy with which the national opinion is stated and acted upon in reference to any particular point. In short, our electoral anomalies are endless, and would never have lasted so long as they have, but for the existence in our free press of a safety-valve of no ordinary dimensions.

Have we not reason, then, in our movement, which we this day inaugurate? A previous organization, of which I would speak with all respect, gave up its work when it had, in reality, gained nothing—Mr. Morley's friends, who promised much: they make no sign. Mr. Morley, instead of leading, as he seemed to intend, a new movement in favour of Reform, seems terrified at the scolding of a portion of the press, and confines himself to defending the education compromise at a meeting of school children near his house. Shakespeare, in "Venus and Adonis," tells us of—

" . . . the snail, whose tender horns being hit,  
Shrinks back into his shelly cave with pain,  
And there, all smothered up, in shade doth sit  
Long after, fearing to put forth again."

Let us, then, take up the task before which the Reform League and Mr. Morley's committee have both quailed, but let us do so with the knowledge that we undertake a Herculean work.

Unless great pressure be exerted from outside, the progress towards uniformity in the weight of votes will probably be slow. From the very fact that the great boroughs are terribly under-represented, their power in the House of Commons, as compared with the small boroughs, is trifling indeed. There are only about ninety members, many of them Conservatives, who sit for the great under-represented towns; and they have to face, even if they are united, a great majority, largely composed of those who sit for the towns, from which it would be necessary to take their special representation. There is little inclination in Parliament voluntarily to reform itself without pressure from outside. Pressure from outside has not yet been brought to bear, and progress towards uniformity is likely, in any event, to be but slow. Still, as old William Cobbett said of his "Cottage Economy," "It must be a

real devil in human shape who does not applaud the man who could sit down to write this book," so say we of those who do not applaud our work. I know not whether we are going to embarrass the Liberal party, and I only share the views expressed this morning if I say that I don't much care. If our leaders are embarrassed, it is their fault, not ours. Let them read Bishop Berkeley's words, who says, "It is very possible for either party to get the better of the other if they could first get the better of themselves, and, instead of indulging the womanish passion of obstinacy, steadily promote the interest of their country."

If there be any cause that can justify agitation, surely it is that on which we are met to-night to take counsel together. I hope we run no risk of a five pound fine a-piece for saying so, but is it not monstrous that the people of London should be denied the opportunity of saying so unless they spend their money upon halls like this? I often don't agree in what is said by the orators in Hyde Park, but I agree in its being said, and freely said. If nonsense is sometimes talked there along with sense, it is nonsense which is far better spoken out than kept in to turn to bitterness. But if the occasional talking of nonsense is a sufficient cause for the suppressing of an habitual gathering, other and more august assemblies might suffer.

In entering upon this movement, I conceive that we are only doing our duty to the State. It is the bounden duty of every representative of a constituency whose voice is not fully heard, and of every man possessing any political power at all, not to rest satisfied, and not to allow the question of Reform to be dropped, so long as our electoral system continues to be the mockery that it is at the present time. How can men venture to talk of a settlement of the question, when you have one-half of the House of Commons representing more than four times as many voters as the other half, who may tie them on a division? and when, as a fact, you often have laws passed or laws rejected upon votes in which the majority of the electors are represented by the members who form the minority in the division? So long as this continues to be the case, it is idle to talk of having reached even a temporary settlement of Parliamentary Reform.







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